Rithöfundursögur, or Writer Sagas:

A Narrative Inquiry of 10th-Graders' Compositions of Agentic Writer Identity in a Choice-Rich, Self-Reflective, and Mindset-Supportive English Class

by

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ABSTRACT

A sequential mixed-methods action research study was undertaken with a group of 10th-grade students enrolled in a required English course at an independent secondary school. The purpose of the study was to investigate students' negotiation of agentic writer identity in a course that featured a three-strand intervention: (a) a high degree of student choice; (b) ongoing written self-reflection; and (c) ongoing instruction in mindset. The researcher drew on self-determination theory and identity theory to operationalize agentic writer identity around three constructs—behaviors, identity, and belief. A questionnaire was used to identify an array of cases that would illustrate a range of experiences around agentic writer identity. Questionnaire data were analyzed to identify a sample from which to collect qualitative data and to identify prominent central relations among the three constructs, which were further explored in the second stage through the qualitative data. Qualitative data were gathered from a primary group of six students in the form of student journals and interviews around the central constructs of writing belief, writing behavior, and writer identity. Using a snowballing sampling method, four students were added to the sample group to form a second tier of data. The corpus of qualitative data from all 10 students was coded and analyzed using the technique of re-storying to produce a narrative interpretation, in the style of the Norse saga, of students' engagement in agentic writing behaviors, espousal of agentic writing beliefs, and construction of agentic writer identities. A defense of the chosen narrative approach and genre was provided. Interpretation of the re-storied data was provided, including discussion of interaction among themes that emerged from the data and the re-storying process. Emergent themes and phenomena from the re-storied data were realigned with the

quantitative data as well as with the constructs that informed the survey design and sampling. Implications for classroom teachers, as well as suggestions for further research, were suggested.

DEDICATION

For Mom and Dad

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For coaching me along this long and joyful road, I thank my committee. For supporting and encouraging me, and for modeling lifelong learning, I thank my parents. For constant backup and inspiration, and for a laboratory where I could apply and extend my learning, I thank my colleagues and students at Phoenix Country Day School. For coffee, cat pictures, pep talks, and laughs, I thank Taylor, Kyle, and Avery at the Starbucks at 32nd Street and Lincoln. For his quiet, unflagging patience and belief in me, I thank my husband, Fred. I can almost promise this is the last time I'll go back to school. *Almost*.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

"I am not a Squonk. My writing, however, is."

So began my student's final self-reflection. The Squonk, she went on to explain, was a sad and lonely creature that haunted the wilds of northern Pennsylvania. If you wanted to find the hideous Squonk, you would listen for its wailing or follow its trail of tears. For this end-of-semester assignment, I had asked my sophomores to compose "thorough, detailed, sensitive, and insight-seeking reflection[s] on [their] journal-writing throughout the semester." This student, whom I will call Runa[1], fulfilled the assignment, providing self-reflective insights like the following:

"Once my pencil hits the paper, I am no longer Runa, but am anyone I choose to be. I step into the shoes of a random figure, and write. What I've noticed from my journals is that when I transform into a different character, I'm like a Squonk. My normal upbeat self turns into an overemotional pile of words splattered on a paper."

The assignment did not require—or even suggest—that students liken their writing selves to fictional, mythical characters. Depicting her writing voice as a sad, lonely, legendary creature was Runa's choice. She went on:

"Continuing on my Squonkiness only a few journals later, I started off with a poem called 'Sometimes.' I'm almost positive this wasn't the prompt of the day, but obviously something pressed on my mind to write about this. In the poem, I step into the shoes of a person who is always helping others but never gets any recognition and feels

[1] To protect the identity of minor participants, they have been assigned pseudonyms. These names served as their "character" names in the restoried sagas presented in Chapter 4. The significance of the chosen names will be discussed in Chapter 3.

invisible. Just like the Squonk, when this person I took on feels like this, they become excessively sad, but doesn't let anyone know that. The Squonk goes and hides and is extremely hard to catch, disappearing in tears. This person masks their emotions and keeps taking others' "throws like a punching bag." I don't know why I choose to write as though I am actually like this, but I have some ideas. I think for one, it's an outlet. Even though I believe I am not feeling these emotions, I choose to write about it as if I am. And then, when I truly am experiencing them, I already expressed them, which makes it easier to cope. I then can look back at my writing and feel as though I have someone to relate to, even if that person is really just me."

I think any teacher would be pleased with Runa's self-reflection; I know I was. Here was a student who, in her reflective writing, was doing so many things that teachers claim to value and encourage in young writers (Atwell, 2015): writing to process her emotions. Writing to build empathetic bridges to others' experiences. Writing to anticipate emotions and experiences that await her. Pursuing her own aesthetic agenda. Taking risks. Better yet, Runa was aware of herself doing these things with and through her writing.

Concluding that journal reflection, Runa wrote:

"I think I started to accept the Squonkiness deep inside me. I don't mean that I define myself as a Squonk (like I said that's just my style of writing), but I realized that it's what makes me who I am, what makes me unique and different from any person at [school] or even anyone in the world. I don't classify myself as a 'talented' writer, but I do know that my writing moves people, or at least moves me. For my future journal entries to come, I hope that I will be able to use the unique writing style in my current

project: a book about happiness. Although they are just a bunch of words I jot down on a paper in a short 7-8 minutes, after a lot of changes and editing I think they would be really useful. …

To this day, my journals are still taking on the role as a Squonk, and I don't think that will ever change. Even though my knowledge and structure of writing might alter, the tone I tend to cling to that defines my writing as [an] individual most likely won't. So even though I, Runa, may not be a Squonk, my writing is and with that I hope it never changes."

From this excerpt, it seemed clear that Runa took pride in her distinctive point of view. She had a past with writing, one in which she seemed to hide or apologize for the Squonkiness of her work. Then, at some point, she had moved into a different present: She had come to appreciate the Squonkiness of her writing. And she saw a future for herself in writing; she anticipated that while she could change how or what she writes, she would maintain an essential identity as a writer. She valued revision. She had big plans—she made reference to a book she was writing about happiness. And yet, she declared that she didn't think of herself as a talented writer.

In fact, in other classroom interactions (both structured and informal), Runa frequently volunteered that she's not really a writer.

Funny, she sure sounded like a writer to me.

Runa was like so many of my 10th-grade students in her uneasy relationship with the behaviors and activities associated with writing, with the way she thought of writing, and with herself as a writer. Publicly, she refused the title "writer," even as she wrote, aptly and evocatively, of her experiences and her inner self. She refused the title "writer,"

even as she wrote herself into new understandings, both of herself and of her world. She refused the title "writer," but she wrote. Secretly.

I had other students who had more confidence in their writing than did Runa. Broder was—or appeared to be—quite certain of himself as a writer. He described with evident glee a story he wrote during his freshman year, the words tumbling out in teenager patois: "I was, like, super-duper inspired and, like, the story wrote itself in like 30 minutes, and it was like one of those things that I was like, I got 100 percent on it." Broder's anecdote hit all the marks of what many of my students might describe as the experiences of a "good writer": the ideas came immediately, the writing was produced quickly and effortlessly; the grade was good. But Broder, who declared that he wanted to be a writer or filmmaker when he grew up, was not without his writing insecurities: "Me and writing have a complex relationship," he said. "I sometimes have issues with not believing that I can do it. … I get caught up in thinking it's not good enough. …So a lot of the times I don't write, because when I do, I just find myself giving up like a page in."

Runa and Broder may have had no idea how much they had in common as writers.

After several years of teaching 10th-grade English, I became fascinated by these complex attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and identities around writing. I have had many students like Runa, self-professed not-writers who were writing secret books at home in their spare time. And I have had many students like Broder, who laid bold claim to identities or futures as writers but who kept a different secret—that sometimes writing was difficult or unsatisfying for them. In this research project I set out to explore the complex relationship my sophomore students had with writing. To do so, I had to first

examine whether what I was seeing in my students was unique, and then I had to explore, via self-reflection, my own objectives and expectations for them as writers.

The enthusiasm, dread, ambivalence, joy, and fear I observed in my students was by no means aberrant or even unusual, nor were the strongly held beliefs I observed in students about where writing can, and should, be done. In fact, Broder's description of his "complex relationship" with writing, as evocative as it is, was consistent with what other researchers have observed in adolescents' attitudes, feelings, and beliefs, around writing.

Olthouse (2012) decided at the outset of her study to characterize student engagements with writing as a "relationship," whereas in my context it was a participant himself (Broder) who supplied that metaphor. Olthouse (2012) argued that much of the existing literature on "relationships" with writing emphasize the perspectives of established, professional writers from a biographical perspective; in response, she explored how developing writers conceptualize their relationships with writing, taking into account emotions, identity, personality traits, contextual factors, and the interaction of personality and context. Consistent with my own anecdotal experience described above, Olthouse (2012) found a mixed bag of student stances toward writing: for example, she reported that students emphasized the therapeutic aspects of creative writing, but insisted that emotion and identity were irrelevant to academic (that is, non-creative) writing.

My preoccupation with the role of agency in developing young writers has also been present in others' research efforts: Jeffery and Wilcox (2014) examined adolescents' attitudes toward writing across various academic disciplines and across achievement levels. These authors also used the definition of agency as "the socioculturally mediated

capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112) to operationalize writing as "a flexible, dynamic instrument for knowledge construction, including knowledge of self, other, and academic subjects" (p. 1097). In that study, the researchers found that students preferred writing that they perceived to allow for inventive, subjective stance-taking, which they perceived as being primarily the domain of their English and Language Arts courses. Further, Jeffery and Wilcox (2014) found that students preferred—indeed, were excited by—writing which they perceived as endowing them with the capacity to act.

Somewhat problematically, according to Jeffery and Wilcox (2014), students perceived a polarity: the writing they considered agentic was that which was subjective and done in English courses; writing in other courses was viewed as being largely transcriptive—not subjective, and therefore not offering the student writers as much capacity to act. Though this polarity was less pronounced among higher-achieving students than lower-achieving ones, and less pronounced among high-school students than middle-school students, Jeffery and Wilcox (2014) posited that students needed more support and more opportunities to experience writing as a means of knowledge construction across the disciplines, including the introduction of "writing to learn" principles, which will be discussed at more length in Chapter 2.

Although Jeffery and Wilcox (2014) examined student perceptions about writing across disciplines and concerned themselves with types of writing that were agency-conducive for students, Pajares, Johnson, and Usher (2007) examined the way that students developed beliefs about their efficacy as writers. Pajares, Johnson, and Usher (2007) were also concerned with agency, but for their purposes they derived their definition of the term not from Ahearn (2001) but from Bandura (1986), specifically from

social cognitive theory. Pajares, Johnson, and Usher (2007) examined writing self-efficacy beliefs across elementary, middle, and high school levels and also explored gender differences in the development and origins of these beliefs. Based on Bandura's work, they designed a survey instrument to evaluate the respective weights attributed to four sources of students' self-efficacy beliefs around writing: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasions, and psychological and emotional states. They found that the dominant factor that contributed to students' beliefs in their self-efficacy as writers was "mastery experience," which they define as "the interpreted result of one's own previous performance" (p. 106). Broder's description of the story he wrote as a freshman, which was included early in this section, was an example of a mastery experience.

Per Pajares, Johnson, and Usher (2007), at the high school level, social persuasions (that is, being regarded by others as being efficacious) were also found to be a significant contributor to students' beliefs about their own self-efficacy. Pajares, Johnson, and Usher (2007) also found that students' self-efficacy beliefs were highly affected (negatively) by stress and anxiety. The researchers concluded by suggesting that further exploration into students' development of writing self-efficacy beliefs should be undertaken, including examinations of "self-talk, invitation, experiences of flow, self-regulatory strategies, as well as psychological processes such as hope and optimism" (p. 117). It was to this space of inquiry that my own study contributed.

I wanted Broder and Runa, and the many more students who made up a spectrum of attitudes and beliefs about writing and themselves as writers, to bring their writing out of the dark. I wanted more of them to write, as some of them did, voluntarily and for

pleasure. But more importantly, I wanted them to broaden their understanding of what writing could do and what writers did. I wanted them to turn to writing not just as a way to record their thoughts but to also to deepen, complicate, and enrich their thinking. It was not that I wanted to churn out more students who declared an intention to pursue writing as a profession; it was that I wanted them writing their way through their other academic subjects and through their personal, professional, and civic lives beyond school.

Description of the Problem of Practice

Though Chapter 2 will include a weightier discussion of the prominence and importance of writing in secondary education, as well as a survey of germane pedagogical approaches to writing, it should be evident from the studies described above that writing holds a particular significance in students' lives—such that they describe it, voluntarily, in relationship terms. As will be discussed in that later section, scholars have long held that writing has a particular—and perhaps unique—relationship to thinking, a relationship that is hardly limited, as the students in the aforementioned studies might believe it to be, to the realm of English and Language Arts.

For example, Schneider and Zakai (2016), writing from the perspective of the history discipline, argued that the kinds of thinking required of historians—"historical thinking skills" (p. 2)—necessitated that students engage in the work of writing history. That is, per Schneider and Zakai (2016), one does not (indeed *cannot*) learn to think historically until and unless one writes history. But of course not all students aspire to become historians.

Consider, then, Steele's (2005) discussion of the uses of writing in helping middle-grade students to "think algebraically" (p. 142). She pointed out that the role of

writing in mathematics goes well beyond students' depicting their understandings so their teachers can assess them; rather, she posited that "an important part of learning to think mathematically is to take part in the discourses of mathematics," of which writing is one important form. Steele (2005) drew on the Vygotskian perspective that "language and thought become dialectic" (p. 143). It appears that one could inventory every subject in the academic schedule to generate subject-area-specific evidence that writing has a particular relationship to thought that other manipulations of language (verbal discussion with others, internal self-talk) lack—some researchers have gone so far as to say that writing within a field leads to "better thinking" in that field (Hunter & Tse, 2013, p. 237). There has been compelling research into the power of writing to transform thinking in, among other subjects, economics, political science, medicine, law, science, mathematics, history, art, and music (Hunter & Tse, 2013; Schneider and Zakai, 2016; Steele, 2005; Stout, 1992; Cavdar & Doe, 2012; Brown, 2009; Liao & Wang, 2016). If writing transforms thinking in each discipline—that is, if writing is seen as a way to learn to think like a scientist, mathematician, historian, musician, artist, physician—is it such a leap to argue that writing transforms thinking? That writing is a way to learn to think?

Elbow (1983), who advocated freewriting as a means of cultivating agency and first-order, creative thinking skills in students, and who will be discussed at more length in a later section, considered whether writing had any special capability in developing thought that individuals couldn't develop by other means. This question is important to the current study, as I would like to be reasonably certain that my own powerful self-identification as a writer, and my own reliance on writing as a way to complicate and enrich my own thinking, isn't the only reason I want to cultivate my students'

relationships with writing. In short, just because writing works for me (and I like it), does that mean it will work for them? Can they become thinkers some other way? Elbow (1983) considered speech as well as nonlinguistic processing and argued that, while each has its benefits, neither exploited "the autonomous generative powers of language and syntax themselves," the way writing, particularly freewriting, did, and that neither matched writing's ability to be "a lively and surprising force for generation" (p. 39).

And yet, as long as students believe—as I have found they do, and as Olthouse (2012) and Jeffery and Wilcox (2014) found they do—that writing has limited and specific disciplinary homes (language arts) and genre-specific potential (i.e., creative writing involves emotions and draws on identity, but scholarly writing does not, as a participant in my own study said, in so many words), they are unlikely to turn to writing voluntarily to transform, deepen, complicate, and develop their thinking in the ways that will be required of them in anything they become. To encourage students to make that voluntary turn toward writing is what I hoped to accomplish in my action research. Students who have made that turn, I believed, would be those inclined to engage in writing behaviors, make claims of writing identity, and espouse beliefs about the cognitive power of writing, and they would direct those three aspects toward any role or capacity they filled in their academic, occupational, personal, and civic lives.

What I discovered is that I want to help my students cultivate *agentic writer identity*, my own term for the role of writing I described in the previous paragraph. Becoming any kind of writer—indeed, becoming any kind of *anything*—takes time. I didn't think I could turn my sophomores into agentic writers over the course of a semester or a year. Instead, I wanted to explore where my students were in their

development of agentic writer identity, with the full awareness that they would leave me at the end of the year and continue becoming themselves in the intricate, recursive process by which all identity is formed (and reformed).

But I'm getting ahead of myself. That's the future. Let's go back to the past, to August, when my classroom was first filling with these strangers who would be my sophomores. My first step would be the administration of a tool to help me glean a quick snapshot of my students' agentic writer identity—to start to tease out who these students were, and where they'd been, and what they thought, and what they did when it came to writing.

Based on those survey results, Broder turned out to have quite "high" agentic writer identity, while Runa's responses suggested she had "low" agentic writer identity.

But even that's not the full story, even if it is how the story starts. In fact, it's not even where the story of Broder and Runa as writers starts; it's just where this telling of the story starts. So let's go back, or zoom out (choose your metaphor). A story needs a setting.

The Context: The Class, the School, the Community

The class. Broder and Runa—these were not their real names—and their classmates were students enrolled in a required 10th-grade English course called "Marginality and the Other in Literature." Reading- and writing-intensive, the course featured a reading list and associated activities intended to invite students to critically examine power structures in society as well as the role writing (taken here as both the gerund, as in *writing* that students do, and the noun, as in the *writing* they produce) can play in perpetuating and challenging those socially constructed power dynamics. During

the fall semester, students took a common course. In the spring, each student selected one of two themed approaches under the umbrella of the "Marginality and the Other" course, one examining immigrant experiences and one examining power in the public sphere (e.g., the legal, medical, and educational systems).

Texts on the reading list, inclusive of classics as well as titles by and about women, people of color, and others frequently marginalized by the traditional Western high school canon, included *The Book of Unknown Americans* (Henriquez, 2014), *Best Intentions: The Education and Killing of Edmund Perry* (Anson, 1987), *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1958), *Othello* (Shakespeare, 1623), *Imagining America: Stories from the Promised Land* (Brown and Ling, Eds., 2003), *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Hurston, 1937), *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (Fadiman, 1997), *Rowing to America: The Immigrant Project* (Karen et al., 1999), and *Antigone* (Sophocles, 441 B.C.).

The School. The School was a tuition-based, secular independent school located in the American Southwest. It served students in grades pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. The School comprised three divisions: A Lower School (pre-K through grade 4), a Middle School (grades 5 through 8), and an Upper School (grades 9 through 12). Students who attended the School from pre-K or kindergarten through graduation were referred to as "Lifers." The School was established in 1961 "based on the traditional East Coast private school model" ("History") and its first graduating class matriculated in 1965. The School's stated mission statement was to prepare "promising students to become responsible leaders and lifelong learners through an education that emphasizes

intellectual engagement, independence, collaboration, creativity, and integrity" ("Mission & Philosophy").

As an independent day school, the curriculum was developed autonomously and was not governed by state educational regulations or measures (i.e., students did not take the AIMS, ESSA, or other mandated assessments). In addition to core academic subjects, the School offered an array of electives, which reflected the interests and expertise of faculty and students, as well as independent studies. A core value of the School was small class sizes to facilitate one-on-one interaction between faculty and students. Graduation requirements met or exceeded those established by state requirements, and students did take PSATs, SATs, ACTs, and AP exams. AP-designated courses, as well as SAT prep courses, were offered as part of the official curriculum. The School sent 100% of its graduates to further study at colleges and universities.

The School was a member school of the National Independent Schools Association (NAIS) and was accredited by the Independent School Association of the Southwest (ISAS). Choice was a prominent feature of independent school life well beyond the school where the research took place: families chose to send their children to private schools; the headmaster chose new hires based on demonstrated ability or potential without regard for state certification requirements and then chose each year which teachers are returning; teachers chose, to a large extent, both what they taught and how. Like other independent schools, the School was not beholden to any other institution or system and chose its own curriculum, admission criteria, graduation requirements, and disciplinary policies.

Nevertheless, even though enrollment in and attendance at the School was elective, most of the students' courses—in English as well as in other departments—were prescribed. Students in the Upper School (grades 9 through 12) could often be overheard bemoaning the lack of choice in electives. The School's students were required to take four years of English in the Upper School, commensurate with state graduation requirements. Within the curriculum design at the time of the study, all freshmen took English I ("What Does It Mean to Be Human? Foundations in Language and Literature"), all sophomores English II ("Marginality and the Other in Literature"), and all juniors English III ("Dreaming America: Voices and Visions").

During their senior year, students were required to take English; however, for the first time in their studies of English, they were able to choose what English course(s) to take. Offerings included "Time Out: Uses of Nonlinear Narratives in Literature," "Monstrous Ink: The Role of Monsters in Ancient and Modern Literature," "The Short Story," "Art of Composition," "Science Fiction," "African American Literature," "Shakespeare," and the Advanced Placement English course (not all senior English electives were offered every semester).

The faculty who made up the English department believed that these courses articulated according to a loose thematic development: As freshmen, students were exploring what it means to be human (as opposed to divine), while getting a rigorous introduction to grammar and style. As sophomores, the course in which the participants in this study were enrolled, students were exploring the ways that humans group themselves and each other, exploring power dynamics and challenges to the status quo. Study of grammar and style was contextualized within this theme of the Other. As

juniors, students focused their study of humans to the great experiment that is humans on this landmass called America; they continued to study grammar and mechanics in context. As seniors, students chose how to specialize their study; the English department faculty members believed the offerings gave students an adequate amount of choice as seniors, though department members were grappling with how much choice was appropriate for the lower grade levels.

Similarly, other school policies, such as heavily weighted final exams, were being reconsidered. With encouragement from the administration, faculty members were both experimenting with offering alternative assessments (papers, projects, performances) in lieu of final tests and re-evaluating the grade-weighting of those final assessments (School policy formerly dictated a weight of 25%; recently, faculty were encouraged to weight the final as they saw fit). In short, the school culture during the time in which the study was conducted was undergoing a shift to include more student choice and autonomy.

These re-evaluations were taking place concurrent with the School's effort to examine how, when, where, and to what extent students were engaged in their learning. In 2014, the School contracted with Stanford's Challenge Success program to collect data from the student body about such dimensions as engagement, pressure, sleep, nutrition, balance, stress, homework, relationships with faculty, etc. During the 2015-16 school year, Upper School faculty members undertook a collaborative qualitative research project during which each faculty member "shadowed" an Upper School student for a full school day, with optional follow-up interview. Initial results suggested students were moderately engaged in learning, with the lowest levels of engagement seen in the Upper

School division. Early coding of observation data suggested students were least engaged when they were being assessed and most engaged when they were involved in experiential learning, but that experiential learning made up a relatively small percent of their time at school. Choice (of content, learning style, feedback style, or assessment style) was not explicitly examined in either the Stanford Challenge Success data collection or the faculty shadow data collection. A prominent finding from the Challenge Success engagement was a high level of pervasive stress and anxiety cutting across all grade levels.

The community. The price tag for a year's education for a single student ranged from $19,300 for pre-K to $23,900 for Upper School, not including fees, textbooks, and meal costs. By way of comparison, the School's tuition was more than twice as much as in-state tuition at its home state's public universities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, many families who elected to send their children to the School were very wealthy. Many parents were physicians, lawyers, university professors and administrators, C-level executives, and business-owners. Related to family financial status, most students of age drove their own cars to school, and relatively few held after-school jobs. However, some families were decidedly upper middle- and middle-class and had simply elected to scrimp elsewhere in their lives in order to spend those resources on school tuition. Further, between 20 and 25 percent of the school's students received need-based financial aid, with the average aid package for the most recent school year having been more than $13,000 per student. It must be noted, though, that the state in which the School was located, 17.4 % of the population lived below the poverty level and the per-capita income

average was approximately $26,000 (U.S. Census Bureau). In short, the school community was not financially representative of its community.

Though the School did not rank students or even publish their cumulative or semester GPAs, students were very aware of one another's course load and performance. The constant specter of college admissions loomed over the campus like a thundercloud starting in grade 6 or earlier. Although the School provided a dedicated team of college counselors who worked with students one-on-one starting in their sophomore and junior years, helping students get to know themselves, their aptitudes, their desires, and their options, there remained a prevailing (and parent-driven) culture of "get into the best big-name school you can and go there, no matter what, whether you like it or not."

There seemed to be some ambivalence from these driven, ambitious parents and students about writing: Academic writing was at once seen as a crucial skill students would need to gain entry to college and succeed there, while "creative" writing was often dismissed as a lark or hobby that was unserious and unproductive. For example, a parent told me one year that she wanted me to help her 15-year-old daughter "operationalize her creative writing." In daily School culture, little attention was paid to the role of writing beyond college, except in the context of a series of "Writer's Workshops," wherein the school invited quasi-notable professional writers to discuss their experiences, processes, and works. These events tended to be poorly attended, and only by students who intensely self-identified as writers or who aspired to writing careers.

Description of Innovation

To encourage students to fully cultivate an agentic writer identity, such that they viewed writing as a powerful cognitive and expressive tool that would help them better

understand themselves and their worlds in *any* educational, occupational, civic, or personal capacity, I proposed that students needed three things: they needed to engage in agentic writing behaviors, espouse agentic writing beliefs, and claim a writer identity for themselves—in short, they had to *believe* and *behave* as writers, and they had to *be,* in their own view, writers. These three central constructs were operationalized as follows: I argued that, in terms of *behavior*, agentic writers revise their work voluntarily, participate in critique, and submit their work for publication or performance. In addition to those agentic behaviors, I maintained further that agentic writers *believe* writing can sharpen and complicate thinking. And finally, I held that truly agentic writers—those most likely to cultivate their writing beyond what is required of them in school, and who will turn to writing to enhance their thinking through, and participation in, academic, professional, and civic activities—were those who *identified* themselves to some degree as writers.

Tantalizingly central to my research was a chicken-or-egg quandary: Must students identify as writers to espouse agentic writing beliefs or engage in agentic writing behaviors? Or does a claim of writing identity emerge after one enacts agency in writing behaviors and beliefs, perhaps after being encouraged to do so? Further, might the "answer" to that chicken-egg riddle differ among students? A fuller discussion of how "agency" is being used here, as well as quantification of agentic writing behaviors and beliefs, follows in Chapter 2. To be supported in these efforts, I argued, students needed a classroom environment and a curriculum that encouraged all three.

To that end, I designed a three-strand intervention comprising (a) a curriculum rich in student choice; (b) regular opportunity for written self-reflection on their writing

processes, products, and identities; and (c) ongoing instruction in mindset to foster an agentic writing identity–conducive space for all students.

Though it may be tempting to map a three-strand intervention neatly to a set of three constructs, it is important to note the limitations of doing so. Each of the three strands of the intervention (choice, reflection, mindset) had relevance to and implications for more than one of the underlying constructs. For example, inviting students to self-reflect on their identities as writers certainly activated the identity construct, but that self-reflection was itself an activity that invited and activated their mindsets.

Nevertheless, the three strands of innovation were designed to work together to foster the three-pronged agentic writer identity. Each of the three strands of the innovation could be viewed as being associated most strongly with a primary construct, as shown in Table 1. Essentially, the primary construct was the construct most closely, and most evidently, associated with the intervention strand.

Table 1

Alignment of Three-Strand Innovation with Underlying Constructs

Innovation Strand	Primary Construct	Secondary Construct(s)
Choice	Behavior	Identity, Belief
Self-Reflection	Identity	Belief, Behavior
Mindset	Belief	Behavior, Identity

For example, presented with a choice of writing actions (sending work to a contest, seeking out voluntary peer-review, etc.), students were acutely aware of their writing-associated behaviors; choosing to do or not do something was closely behavior-associated. Yet the choices one made had implications for identity and were informed by

beliefs—both the case whether the chooser was aware of the identity or belief implications of his or her choice. Likewise, engaging in written self-reflection of their work as writers, as students were asked to do in this study, was an explicit opportunity for students to negotiate overtly with identity; less close to the surface, but present in their self-reflections, were latent beliefs that served as warrants in their self-reflection, and of course the written self-reflection was itself a reified product of behavior (was it written quickly or slowly? Did the student review his or her writing artifacts before reflecting? Did the student annotate or mark up the writing to construct the self-reflection? Was the reflection shared with anyone else?).

Finally, instruction in mindset activated students' awareness of their beliefs (about intelligence, about potential, etc.) in overt ways; based on that engagement with beliefs (either extant beliefs about thinking or newly acquired beliefs about thinking), students could engage in behaviors to perpetuate or disrupt their own thinking. Modifications to identity could follow. The implications of mindset on belief, behavior, and identity will be discussed at more length in Chapter 2.

The reader should recall that my long-term goal was to help my students claim a true agentic writer identity—to become individuals who employ writing as a means of problematizing, complicating, and clarifying their thinking in academic, professional, personal, and civic capacities. Indeed, the list of occupations to which my students aspire (and in which past students currently work) is a near-match to the aforementioned inventory of disciplines in which researchers have pointed out the particular relationship of writing to thinking. Occupations aside, they will all go on to be people, with personal

and civic lives. In those capacities, as well, I argued, agentic writing identity would enhance their thinking.

Another way to position this figuratively is that agentic writing behaviors, agentic writing beliefs, and claims to writer identity were three gateways to agentic writer identity. And yet, as illustrated by Broder and Runa in the opening passages of this discussion, students arrived in the 10th grade with different histories, ongoing circumstances, and ambitions as writers. For that reason, the innovation I designed was intended to meet students wherever they were in their negotiation of agentic writer identity and to reinforce it.

At this point, I would like to invite the reader to imagine a pair of three-dimensional models that depict the relationship of underlying construct to innovation. The first of these is an orbital model I call the SAGA (Start Anywhere, Go Anywhere) Model for Agentic Writer Identity, and the second of these is a pair of "Viking" braids like one might find on either side of the head of the opera singer portraying Brunnhilde in Wagner's *The Ring of the Niebelung.*

SAGA model. The reader should envision a closed circuit on which the three principal constructs that underpin the study—agentic writing behaviors, agentic writing identity, and agentic—have been arranged. It does not matter in what order the reader arrays the three constructs on the round circuit; the circuit should be imagined as allowing travel in either direction. The three constructs can be imagined as doorways to the circuit. I call this imaginary model the SAGA (Start Anywhere, Go Anywhere) Model for Agentic Writer Identity. As depicted in the SAGA model, this study was predicated on the hypothesis that agentic writing beliefs, claims of writer identity, and agentic

writing behaviors constituted three doorways or entry points to the perpetual and mutually reinforcing three-node circuit: My hypothesis was that increased choice, mindset instruction, and regular written self-reflection would support students' forays into this agentic writing cycle. Developing an agentic writer identity would mean traveling the circuit, no matter where one enters, such that one engaged in the behaviors and beliefs and made claims to writer identity. Nurturing or reinforcing that identity would mean traveling the circuit over and over. One is never done "becoming" an agentic writer any more than one is ever done becoming him or herself.

I have chosen not to present this model visually here because there would be no way to do so in two-dimensional space that would not privilege, or make the suggestion of privileging, one or the other of these nodes by its left-most or uppermost placement on the page. Instead, I invite the reader to imagine this circuit in three-dimensional space.

Because students arrive in 10th-grade English with an almost innumerable set of experiences with and attitudes toward writing, it would be foolish for a teacher to expect to march the whole class through a uniform sequence of interventions and steer them all toward the same outcomes; instead, as will be discussed primarily in the literature review and methods sections, this study design acknowledged not only the uniqueness of each student's experience with writing but also the fluidity of identity—even students who arrived in class claiming writer identity, espousing agentic writing beliefs, and engaging in agentic writing behaviors could experience, as their sophomore years got under way, ebbing or erosion of one or more of those aspects, which might be attributable to experiences in other courses, extracurricular and family experiences, or even responses to the intervention itself. The SAGA model was intended to represent that any student, with

any set of writing behaviors, beliefs, or intensity of identification as "writer," could benefit from ongoing reinforcement of and encouragement toward agentic writer identity.

"Viking" braids. I choose to introduce the two-braid visual at this point for two reasons: the first of these is the aforementioned parallelism between a set of three underlying constructs and a three-strand innovation. The second reason is because I have presented my narrative findings in this study in the form of Norse sagas, for reasons that will be explained in a subsequent section. I have chosen an iconography here, braids, that are strongly—and, unlike the horned helmet that Wagnerian soloist is probably also wearing—accurately associated with Norse people. Consider the *New York Times* reporting: "Brigid, blond Viking braids emerging from her knit cap…" (O'Callahan, 2011). Or the website Bustle's headline: "9 Viking Inspired Braids That Are the Perfect Shield Maiden Summer Hair Inspiration for Norse Nerds" (Mina, 2015). Playfulness aside, I have chosen an iconography, the pair of braids, to strengthen the aesthetic integrity, the unity of effect, of the current narrative inquiry. The reader will find that I return repeatedly to this set of braids to invoke the design of the relationship between the underlying constructs and the innovation itself as well as to infuse the study and attendant discussion with the spirit of the inquiry.

Research Questions

The innovation was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do students in a 10th-grade English curriculum featuring choice, ongoing mindset instruction, and regular written self-reflection compose their identities as writers?

- How do they do so in writing?
- How do they do so orally?

2. How does a choice-rich English curriculum, ongoing instruction in mindset, and regular written self-reflection affect 10th-grade students' meaning-making about the relationship between thinking and writing?

3. How does participation in a choice-rich 10th-grade English curriculum featuring ongoing mindset instruction and regular written self-reflections affect students' demonstration of agentic writing behaviors?

- Why do students engage in agentic writing behaviors?
- Which agentic writing behaviors do students demonstrate?

4. How does participation in a choice-rich 10th-grade English curriculum featuring ongoing mindset instruction and regular written self-reflections affect shift students' espousal of agentic writing beliefs?

- Which agentic writing beliefs do students espouse?
- How are agentic writing beliefs reflected by students orally and in writing?

5. How might a narrative inquiry approach allow the researcher to understand and represent the individual and collective aspects of students' agentic writing behaviors and beliefs and composition of writerly identity?

CHAPTER 2

SUPPORTING THEORY AND SCHOLARSHIP

The reader should imagine the pair of Viking braids to recall that the innovation intertwined three strands of innovation (i.e., the "innovation braid") toward the goal of cultivating in 10th-grade writing students a three-strand agentic writer identity (i.e., the "construct braid" of behavior, identity, and belief) that would enhance their academic, professional, civic, and personal understandings well beyond the classroom. The three strands of the "innovation braid" were a) a choice-rich curriculum with b) directed self-reflection and c) instruction in mindset. In this section, I will discuss the relevant theoretical, pedagogical, and curricular frameworks that informed not only this long-term goal (agentic writer identity) but also the interventions I chose (choice, reflection, mindset) to help foster it.

This discussion of supporting theory and scholarship will proceed along four general topic areas: first, a defense of the importance of a research focus on student writing, including discussion of epistemic movements, trends, and individuals in writing pedagogy; second, a discussion of self-determination theory, agency, and identity theory as the theories that inform my concept of agentic writer identity; third, a discussion of the scholarship surrounding student choice, writing self-reflection, and mindset instruction; and, finally, a discussion of my chosen methodology, narrative inquiry, and my chosen narrative genre, saga.

In the first section, devoted to writing theory, I will begin by examining and discussing the theoretical basis for my emphasis on writing and I will survey the writing pedagogies from which I derive my research—and my teaching. This section will

proceed as follows: first, a discussion of the student-centric approaches to writing instruction espoused and described by Atwell (2015), Elbow (1968, 1983, 1985, 1997, 1998, 1999) and Murray (1973, 1978, 1984), in which I will discuss the role of free writing, as well as public and private writing, in the cultivation of writing as a means of modifying thought and developing writerly agency; secondly, a more focused discussion of the body of research on the cognitive consequences of writing; and, finally, the ways that my work builds on and responds to the Writing to Learn (WTL) approach in writing instruction. In this final component of this section it will be made explicitly clear how my work aligns with and departs from the WTL tenets and practices.

Next, by making reference to the imaginary model I referred to as the SAGA (Start Anywhere, Go Anywhere) Model, I will in my second subsection discuss the theoretical frameworks that inform and undergird my work: self-determination theory, which leads somewhat naturally into a discussion of agency, and writerly identity as a distinct area of scholarship within identity research, which I will discuss in light of my long-term goal of helping my students cultivate agentic writer identity.

In my third section, I will connect the strands of my intervention—choice, written self-reflection, and mindset instruction—to the existing literature in these areas, revisiting the aforementioned frameworks as my primary theoretical foundations and additionally drawing on Dweck (1999, 2012), as well as Gee's (2003) work in semiotic domains. Furthermore, in this section, I will attempt to bridge the aforementioned theory that underpins my concept of agency (and the manner in which I have operationalized it) with the literature that supports my chosen three-strand innovation.

The fourth section of the theoretical framework will address my chosen methodology, narrative inquiry—specifically, a technique known as restorying. In this multipart final section, I will provide a historical and theoretical overview of narrative inquiry, emphasizing its central tenets and practices. I will explicitly connect these to my research questions, my study context and participants, and my own worldview and values. I will provide a theoretical basis for the methodological moves I have made, both for data collection and for data analysis.

Finally, I will devote a substantial amount of intention to Norse sagas themselves, detailing historical and literary context for the genre as well as features specific to the saga that make it an ideal form for analyzing and presenting my participants' experiences. In this section, the particular relevance of the saga genre to my research questions, my theoretical frameworks, my chosen intervention, and my own presence in and positionality to my research will be clearly articulated.

Why Focus on Student Writing?

In the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing, the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project (2011) stated unequivocally that "the ability to write well is basic to student success in college and beyond" (p. 2). Articulating the role of schools in preparing students for "college and career readiness," the Framework touted writing as a primary means of fostering "habits of mind [or] ways of approaching learning that are both intellectual and practical and that will support students' success in a variety of fields and disciplines" (Framework, 2011, Executive Summary). Indeed, this collaborative report prepared by the three principal national organizations of writing educators "[took]

as a central premise that teaching writing and learning to write are central to education and to the development of a literate citizenry" (Framework, 2011, p. 2). The nearly unchallenged prominence of writing (at least of certain types) in schools, as well as the ongoing debates about how, when, where, why, and how much to do it, served as justification for my foray into students' attitudes and affective dispositions toward, beliefs about, and behaviors associated with writing. (The particular interest in writing *identity* will be discussed in a subsequent section, as described in the overview.)

However, though most educators will attest to the importance of teaching students to write, there is very little consensus about what constitutes good writing and how those ends are best achieved. There are many schools of thought in writing pedagogy. In my role as a researcher—and, indeed, in my role as a teacher of writing, a capacity I fulfilled comfortably long before I endeavored to undertake educational research—I drew heavily from the tenets of writing instruction espoused and described by Atwell (2015), Murray (1978, 1984, 2009) and Elbow (1997, 1998, 1999). These values inform my stance toward writing, toward myself as a writer and teacher of writing, toward my students as writers, and my research interests.

My teaching—and my concern for students' development as agentic writers by way of choice, self-reflection and mindset instruction—draws heavily from Atwell's (1998) workshop model. This pedagogic model for writing instruction, when originally published in 1987, quickly became a seminal map for teachers attempting to reconfigure pedagogy from static, teacher-centric dissemination of writing instruction to dynamic, student-led discovery of writing power (Taylor, 2000; Brooks, 2006; Lain, 2007). Atwell's (2015) design for the writing workshop, in her original 1987 view as well as her

updated 2015 perspective, was egalitarian and collaborative: the teacher was less ultimate authority than coach or process facilitator. Writing itself, per Atwell (2015), was "a process of discovering meaning and refining it" (p. 13).

Central to Atwell's (2015) writing workshop was a concept she calls "handover," which is closely related to the Vygotskian (1978) concepts of the more knowledgeable other and the zone of proximal development. In Atwell's view, "handover" referred to the positioning of the teacher in the writing classroom to her students as more knowledgeable or experienced, but not the sole or final adjudicator of writing quality. Atwell (2015) used "handover" to connote the "fluidity and purposefulness of a productive adult-child interaction" (p. 15). Atwell (1985, 2015) was explicit about the value of the teacher herself writing alongside students, arguing that students should see their more knowledgeable other similarly invested in the writing process. That I act as, and be perceived as, a writer among my writing students is also crucial to my own pedagogical approach.

In her expectations for the writing workshop, Atwell (2015) included items that align with my three-strand "construct braid" (behavior, identity, belief) as well as with my three-strand "innovation braid" (choice, self-reflection, mindset instruction). For example, Atwell (2015) highlighted student choice (in reading and writing) as nearly synonymous with engagement. She encouraged her own workshop students to "find topics and purposes that matter to who you are now, who you once were, and who you might become"—notable here, of course, is the effect of topic choices on the writer's identity, past, present, and future. In her encouragement of students to make their own decisions about the strengths and weaknesses of their writing, Atwell (2015) invoked

agency, just as she is did when she encouraged students to attempt publication beyond the school environment and to experiment with problem-solving and multiple ways to complete a piece of writing.

Finally, Atwell's (2015) workshop model was rooted in the possibility of writing to help students "discover what they know about a subject and learn more." That is to say, writing in the Atwell (2015) model was more than transcriptive—it was transformative. In the Atwell (2015) model, writing was a process, an approach she derived at least in part from Murray (1978, 1984, 2009).

Murray (2009) offered a set of 10 implications of teaching writing with an emphasis on process rather than product which align not only with my approach to pedagogy and curriculum but also with the stated goals of the current action research study. For example, when students made the kinds of choices described in the Method section of this discussion, they were being asked to "attempt any form of writing which may help [them] discover and communicate what [they] have to say" (Murray, 2009, p. 4). When students wrote in their daily journals, they were being empowered to "use [their] own language" (Murray, 2009, p. 4). Another element derived from Murray (1978) was my desire to bridge the distance between supposed writers and non-writers—that is, to unveil and illuminate the steps, habits, processes, obstacles, and discoveries that those who have produced writing (whether they be myself, my students, or famous writers) have experienced. These are what Murray (1978) described as the writing that happens before the writing. By encouraging my students to self-reflect on their processes and choices, as described in Chapter 3, I was also attempting to help them see their own writing before the writing and in so doing encouraging them to see themselves as agentic

writers. I also drew from Murray (1984), again in the values that inform my teaching and in the design of this action research study, in the foundational belief that "writing is not the reporting of what was discovered, but the act of exploration itself" (p. 1). When I argued that I wanted to encourage my students to incline themselves toward writing agentically, that I wanted them to use writing to become what they want to become, I was arguing that I wanted them to view writing as an act of exploration, one which they could undertake voluntarily and independently.

Another pioneer in the "process pedagogy" movement was Elbow (1998). Elbow's (1998) approach to writing instruction emphasized two forms of independence: first, writers' independence from rigid and externally imposed standards of quality, organization, order, and process—at least during the generative phase of writing. That is, when one is trying to write a first draft, one must wrest free from the voice that offers endless commentary, editing, and imposed strictures and structures. That voice could be a teacher's or a parent's, but it is often the writer's own. The second form of independence stressed by Elbow (1998) was writers' (in this case student writers') independence from teachers as the final, or even primary, determiners of writing topics, quality, process, pace, etc. Elbow (1998) instead emphasized student writers learning from one another as well as student writers becoming empowered adjudicators of their own writing processes and products—a value held by Atwell (2015), as well.

In order to cultivate independence of both sorts in writers, Elbow (2000) proposed a reconsideration of the roles of audience and response. He offered a matrix that presented a range of response types (from "sharing, but no response" to "criticism or evaluation") against a range of audiences (from "audiences with authority, e.g., teachers,

editors, supervisors, employers" to "audience of self alone") (p. 29). Arguing that in-school writing too heavily traveled one corner of that map—writing generated for an audience with authority (i.e., teachers) offering criticism and evaluation, Elbow (2000) argued that "writing prospers most when we have the riches range of experiences with audience and response" (p. 29).

To achieve these two kinds of independence, and to travel more completely the map of writing experiences across audience and response types, Elbow (1983, 1987, 1998) advocated certain techniques, primarily the use of freewriting. Elbow advocated freewriting (approximately 10 minutes daily, with no prescribed topic or focus) as a means of putting a wedge between the "generative" dimension or stage of writing and the editing and revision stage. It must be stressed that this approach did not hold that editing and revision were unnecessary, only that they couldn't reasonably be done while one was trying to come up with the words themselves. Generating text and improving that text via revision were two distinct processes; freewriting was offered as a means of improving students' fluidity, facility, and comfort with the generative dimension.

Another concept attributed to Elbow (1999) was the concept of "private writing" (p.140). This was writing that occupied a corner of the previously described map where the only intended audience was the writer. Here, Elbow had a theoretical fight to fight, as according to some scholars at least the social constructivist view held that "writing is not"—*ever*—"a private act" (Bruffee, 1998, qtd. in Elbow, 1999, p. 141). In response, Elbow (2000) conceded that all writing is "shaped by the medium of language—which, of course, is highly social" (p. 144) and shaped and affected by culture (again, inherently social) but also pointed out that Vygotsky (1962), pioneer of the social constructivist

perspective, never argued that language was not used for private ends, only that individuals learn language socially *and* then internalize their language-based interactions with others in the forms of self-talk and, ultimately, thought. Elbow (1999) offered his defense of private writing—writing that students generate with no obligation, or even intention, of showing them to anyone—as a means of endowing students with choice, agency, and enhanced ability to think.

Here, then, is a useful segue into a discussion of the relationship between writing and thought upon which the current study was built. To remain with Elbow (1983) a bit longer, it is useful to borrow his distinction between "first-order thinking" and "second-order thinking," (p. 37). The generative-domain freewriting advocated by Elbow (1983, 1998, 1999) was intended to develop first-order thinking, which he described as intuitive, creative, and often capabale of producing shrewd—even if rough—conceptual insights. Second-order thinking, which Elbow (1983) argued was what people mean when they discuss critical thinking, was thinking that was logical, conscious, directed, skeptical, evaluative, and concerned with accuracy. It bears repeating that Elbow never argued that second-order thinking was unnecessary or irrelevant to writing, only that while writing, a thinker cannot be expected to perform both kinds of thinking simultaneously.

Though writing has long, if not always, enjoyed a prominent position in American schools, almost every aspect of writing (e.g., frequency, type and length, feedback style and amount, place in the curriculum) has been the source of near-constant debate. Also included on this list of school-writing controversies are the reasons or justifications for writing or asking (inviting? requiring?) students to do so: Educators and scholars have not agreed on what writing does, what it shows, or what it looks like when it is done well

(Espin, 2014; Nauman, Stirling, & Borthwick, 2011). Trends in writing instruction have emerged from or responded to prevailing theories about cognition and development, as well as social and political climates. As Murray (1982) pointed out, Elbow's (1973) seminal writing instruction text, *Writing without Teachers,* was "so much a book of the late sixties, a time of idealism and protest, experimentation and anti-authoritarianism" (p. 208). It was no surprise, then, that Elbow's follow-up book, *Writing with Power,* published in the 1980s, likewise reflected even its title, its times. Nevertheless, Elbow's concern across both texts remained regular, authentic, student-driven, writing. And he, like many other epistemic figures in the pedagogy of writing, observed the close relationship between writing and thinking.

William Zinsser (1988) offered his perspective on the relationship between writing and thinking with characteristic straightforwardness: "Writing is thinking. Anyone who thinks clearly should be able to write clearly" (p. 10). Zinsser, of course, was writing for a popular reading audience and with the specific aim of singing the praises of Writing to Learn (WTL), which will be discussed in a later section. Nevertheless, he was dangerously reductive here.

A more nuanced and complicated perspective on the relationship between writing and thinking was articulated by Vygotsky (1986), who argued that while written speech and verbal speech were both means of mediating understanding of the world, resulting in changes both within and without the individual, written speech required an extraordinarily high level of abstraction and conscious, "deliberate structuring of the web of meaning" (p. 182). Rejecting a Piagetian position that might argue that thinking and language are totally discrete, the Vygotskian position held that "language and thinking

are … neither … identical nor … totally separate. Rather, they are assumed to be distinct but intertwined, separate but mutually influential activities linked by a process involving continual transaction between them" (Parker & Goodkin, 1987, p. 34). It is this understanding of thinking and writing that underpins this study.

This work also builds upon a pedagogical movement that has enjoyed a great deal of attention in the literature, even if that movement's popularity or utility is fading. The ensuing discussion of this approach, Writing to Learn (WTL), should be viewed as a respectful acknowledgement of the influence of the movement on the current study, and on me as an educator and student myself, even as I acknowledge the limitations or rejects some of its tenets for the current study.

Writing to Learn (WTL) emerged and solidified through the 1960s, 70s, and 80s in response to prevailing approaches to writing instruction, which privileged product over process and which WTL pioneers believed emphasized "disciplinary rigor, standard curricula, and standard 'objective' evaluation" (Russell, 1994, qtd. in Bazerman et al., 2005, p. 57). WTL built on the Vygotskian notion that language mediated experience and it coincided with an emerging emphasis on process over product in writing instruction. Reviewing the literature supporting WTL and process-focused approaches, Applebee (1984) identified three principal tenets that underlie both:

1) Writing involves a variety of recursively operating sub-processes (e.g., planning, monitoring, drafting, revising, editing) rather than a linear sequence;
2) Writers differ in their use of the processes; and
3) The processes vary depending on the nature of the writing task (p. 582).

Since the emergence of WTL, criticisms and challenges to its effectiveness have also arisen, principally with regard to proponents' claims and evidence of how and whether learning actually takes place. Furthermore, many scholars have refuted the notion that writing in and of itself constitutes or even prompts learning; they argued that certain conditions must be met within the writing experience for it to produce true learning. One of these conditions is that the writing have a metacognitive aspect (Fry & Villagomez, 2012). Here the adherents of WTL depart from Elbow (1998). WTL has often been discussed in the same breath as its cousin, Writing Across the Curriculum, where it has been viewed as a vehicle to enhance "learning" (read: content retention or skills mastery) in non-humanities subjects such as math and science. The application of WTL in these traditionally less writing-focused fields naturally has prompted questions about how to measure the learning that results from writing.

Indeed, in the study at hand, I was not interested in using writing to enhance students' learning of specific vocabulary, skills, or content; rather, I was interested in positioning writing as a way to continuously and learn about one's self and one's world—learning that will never be "measured" per se. As discussed previously, scholars have well established the role that writing plays in cultivating thinkers within specific disciplines; certainly part of participating in the discourses of the discipline is learning content or vocabulary specific to the discipline (Steele, 2005). However, my concern here was somewhat larger than cultivating discipline-specific thinking; for that reason, my alignment with WTL was somewhat limited. Nevertheless, the three aforementioned tenets of Writing to Learn were theoretically and epistemologically germane and are hereby acknowledged as such.

To summarize: My concern with writing behaviors, beliefs, and identity was cultivated through choice, self-reflection, and mindset and incorporated a workshop-inspired (Atwell, 2015), process-oriented approach to writing instruction (Murray, 2009) which created adequate space for students to explore their thinking through free and private writing but which also provided them with multiple real audiences (Elbow, 1998, 1998, 1999) so they could enact choices as agentic writers. In the next section, I will attempt to align these pedagogical frameworks with the theoretical frameworks that are foundational to my study.

Self-Determination Theory, Agency, and Identity Theory

Self-determination theory. Self-determination theory formed the most foundational framework for the current study, as it has been concerned with individuals' principal psychological needs as well as the ability of collective environments to support these needs. Self-determination theory (SDT) was founded by Deci and Ryan, who argued that humans have three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and connectedness (Garn & Jolly, 2014). SDT has been concerned with the role these factors play in individuals' constructions of self—that is, identity—and motivation. Naturally, SDT has rested on and elaborated on the distinctions between intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation, examining such ideas as how praise and reward bolster or undermine individuals' pursuit of autonomous growth. Though the study was not explicitly concerned with motivational theories, it is worthwhile to examine the motivational aspects of SDT here, as students' motivations for writing did emerge in discussions of their writing behaviors and beliefs.

From an SDT perspective, motivation ranges from intrinsic motivation (true self-determination) to different types of extrinsic motivation (determination, minus the "self") to amotivation (neither determined nor "self-") (Garn & Jolly, 2014). Importantly, the social setting in which learning takes place can have a profound effect on individuals' levels of self-determination; this is no less true in a writing-specific learning environment. According to SDT, social and educational contexts that provide people with autonomy, competence, and relatedness are those that encouraged self-determination (Garn & Jolly, 2014). The opposite of an autonomy-supportive classroom is a controlling classroom, in which, for example, student methods for problem-solving are prescribed by a teacher (Black & Deci, 2000).

The three-strand intervention described here, which comprised a high level of student choice along with structured self-reflection and ongoing instruction in mindset, was conceived of specifically to cultivate the three psychological needs central to SDT specifically with regard to writing: *Autonomy* was present in the latitude for students to choose content, styles, and formats for assessments and feedback; the potential for *competence* stemmed from, assumedly, students' choosing things at which they could excel; and *connectedness* appeared in peer-review and critique, feedback and discussion on shared writing, collaborative group writing opportunities, and opportunities for publication and performance (within and outside of the classroom).

A study with a similar theoretic framework (but a different methodology) to the current study was undertaken by Garn and Jolly (2014), wherein the researchers examined the effect of various learning activities and designs, as well as parent and teacher messaging, on the motivational experiences of gifted students enrolled in an

academic summer camp. The purpose of the study was to learn from the students themselves what factors positively and negatively affected their motivations for learning. Like my study, there was no treatment or control group in this study; rather, the sample population included students who elected to participate in a weeklong course built around an independent research project facilitated by teachers who guided their research and took them on relevant field trips. Though the general topic (state history) was prescribed—just as the overarching course theme of marginality was prescribed in my own course—the topic and final product of the project were self-selected by students.

Garn and Jolly (2014) relied on Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to interpret a series of semi-structured student interviews held after the conclusion of the weeklong camp. The researchers acknowledged that they relied heavily on the tenets of SDT to interpret students' subjective reporting; however, they used coding and triangulation to reduce the effect of a theoretical bias (Garn & Jolly, 2014). The results of the interviews revealed two major motivational themes important to this group of gifted students. Both will be discussed here, as they allowed me to connect the dots between researchers' theoretical conceptions of self-determination and students' experiences of self-determination. That is, they allowed me to see how self-determination manifested itself in a student population and culture not drastically different from that of the current study.

The first motivational theme described by Garn and Jolly (2014) they called *The Fun Factor of Learning,* or students' perception of learning activities as personalized and rich in opportunities for student choice. In the study, students expressed that learning was personalized when it was aligned with extracurricular interests and passions or long-term

educational or career goals. Choice in activities was also found to drive student motivation, with students reporting that having a say in what was studied, as well as how they material was presented, motivated them to work harder and left them with more lasting understanding of the material itself.

The second motivational theme that emerged from Garn and Jolly's (2014) study was *The Rewards and Pressures of Good Grades*, which captured the negatively motivational effect of material rewards (money, gifts) in return for good grades, and punishment in exchange for bad grades. These students reported an acute sense of pressure to live up to their gifted moniker. These types of incentives, coming in this case from parents, constitute "introjected regulation": a state in which an individual adopts or complies with external regulation but does not truly accept them as her own (Black & Deci, 2000). In essence, introjection results in external pressures feeling like, or supplanting, internal pressures. The opposite of introjection is identification, in which an individual truly identifies with a value, adopts the behavior as his or her own, and self-regulates authentically.

To that end—authentic identification with, in this case, writing as a tool to enrich thinking—my intervention combined choice, self-reflection, and mindset instruction in order to a) create an environment supportive of self-determination and to incline students toward authentic self-reflection on their choices, principally through the reflective journals, such that they would replace extrinsic motivations and introjected regulation in their writing with intrinsic motivations and authentic identification as writers—in short, agentic writer identity. What follows is a brief discussion of agency as it was used here, as it served a bridge or pivot between self-determination theory and identity theory.

Agency. As discussed previously, a desired long-term outcome of the intervention was for students to choose high-risk, high-exposure writing opportunities and make those choices based on the potential for growth, increased competence, enjoyment, and cognitive benefit instead of safety, grades, compliance, or risk-reduction. Throughout this discussion, I have employed the terms "agentic writing behaviors" and "agentic writing beliefs" to capture these desired outcomes, operating on Ahearn's (2011) definition of agency as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (p. 112). As depicted in the SAGA model discussed previously, this study was predicated on the hypothesis that agentic writing beliefs and agentic writing behaviors constituted two nodes in a perpetual and mutually reinforcing three-node circuit: My hypothesis was that increased choice and mindset instruction would support students' forays into this agentic writing cycle, the third node of which was a claim—even if tentative—of writer identity. In the longest term, I would like to see my students claim a true agentic writer identity—to become individuals who employ writing as a means of problematizing, complicating, and clarifying their thinking in academic, professional, personal, and civic capacities. Another way to position this figuratively was that agentic writing behaviors, agentic writing beliefs, and claims to writer identity could be three gateways to agentic writer identity.

Identity Theory. In Chapter 1, I discussed the compelling mix of attitudes toward and experiences with writing demonstrated by my students, and I located those in a larger body of observation and research of student attitudes toward, and relationships with, writing. To recapitulate: Even those who asserted that they were writers expressed reluctance or skepticism about behaviors and beliefs that I have termed "agentic writing" behaviors and beliefs. My working research hypothesis was that students needed all three

components—a claim on agentic writer identity, engagement in agentic writing behaviors, and espousal of agentic writing beliefs—in order to cultivate an agentic writer identity, which would empower them to use writing to better understand themselves, their studies, their eventual professional pursuits, and their civic and personal lives.

The reader will recall, then, that I proposed an imaginary model, the SAGA ("Start Anywhere, Go Anywhere") model, to represent the aims of this intervention: to meet students wherever they were in terms of their agentic writer identity, their agentic writing behaviors, and their agentic writing beliefs, and encourage them to explore the other components, all the while reflecting on and composing, in speech and in writing, the sagas of their pursuit of agentic writer identity. The reader should here again imagine the three-dimensional SAGA model.

And so, if there is anything that scholars concerned with writing, as well as practitioners of writing instruction, have agreed on, it may be this: writing has "consequences" (Parker and Goodkin, 1987). Among these potential consequences are consequences for the writer's identity. Parker and Goodkin (1987) elaborated thus: "Through writing we can … transform ourselves. We can come to know ourselves differently and, thus, to be different in the world. … And not only can we transform our experience and ourselves through our writing, we can transform others' views of us" (p. 49). In this declaration, one can see several threads pulled from the body of identity research, including the concepts of centrality (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton & Smith, 1997).

An enormous body of research has been devoted to identity development in both adolescents and adults (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton & Smith, 1997; Gurin,

Hurtado, & Peng, 1994), especially with regard to ethnic and racial identity. Much of this work has built on Lewin's (1948) theories about identity within group dynamics, Erickson's (1950) focus on child development and psychosocial stages, and Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory. Other aspects of identity development, such as the negotiation of professional and advanced academic identities, have also been the source of significant research with adults, especially of teachers (Schepens, Aelterman, & Vlerick, 2009; Thomas and Beauchamp, 2011). Youth and adolescents' negotiation of social identities around race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexuality have been studied (Thomas, 2015), as have their identities as students in schools; furthermore, the intersection of these many identities and negotiation of school and student identities have also been examined.

Even more specifically, student identities as writers have been examined, substantially among at-risk youth and English Language Learners (ELLs) (Fernstein, 2008) or among very beginning (kindergarten) or very advanced (graduate-level) writers (Snyders, 2014; Ha, 2009). In these research contexts, writing has been acknowledged not only as reflective of identity but "an act of identity" (Burgess & Ivanic, 2010). As such, writing "can also contribute in some small way to reshaping the socially available possibilities for selfhood" (Burgess & Ivanic, 2010, p. 249). That is, writing has been thought to be agentic; writing can help an individual cultivate agency. Agency, for the purposes of this study, has been defined as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001).

Action, then, is crucial, though it should be acknowledged that "action" encompasses a lot of behaviors, some less obviously "active" than others—choosing to

revise an essay is an "action," as is the revision itself. Both are seen here as actions, even though the first of the two is inward and invisible. Nevertheless, just as critics of WTL argued that writers must do more than *just write* in order to learn, I have argued that writers need do more than *just write* in order to build agentic writer identity. They must also engage in what I have called agentic writer behaviors. These behaviors are, for the most part, social, if not performative, in nature. They demand that the writer position him or herself as a writer (at least, as someone who has written something) in some kind of interaction with others. Stated simply, "through participation, writers gain … identity within forums … contributing a text within a forum establishes a voice to say something" (MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald, 2016, p. 13).

This leaves the final aspect of the SAGA model, agentic writing beliefs, to be discussed. Why must students espouse a set of beliefs about writing in order to attain agentic writer identity that will serve them throughout their academic, professional, civic, and personal lives? Up to this point, I have been careful to define agency as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act," (Ahearn, 2001), and I am going to retain that definition while now acknowledging agency's close relationship to the concept of self-efficacy—so close, in fact, that some have treated them as synonyms (Snyders, 2014) meaning "the perception one has about his or her capabilities" (p. 406). I am not ready to elide the definitions so completely, as I believe the Ahearn (2001) definition included crucial elements (the sociocultural context, the capacity for action, and action itself) that this definition of self-efficacy lacked. However, it is through the literature on students' writing self-efficacy that I offer the justification for my emphasis on agentic writing beliefs.

Certainly social cognitive theory established the importance of individuals' self-efficacy beliefs (Sanders-Reio, Alexander, Reio, & Newman, 2014); that is, part of being able to do something is believing that you have a shot at doing it successfully. However, some research has suggested that writers' beliefs not just about themselves but also about writing contribute to their success as writers. Sanders-Reio, Alexander, Reio, and Newman (2014) found that measures of students' beliefs about writing were more predictive of writing success than measures of their self-efficacy or apprehension. Beliefs about writing have been thought to affect not only students' writing products but also their processes (Graham, Schwartz, & MacArthur, 1993) and the amount of learning that takes place (Baajen, Gailbraith, & de Glopper, 2014). These findings offered some justification for my argument that if students adopted more agentic beliefs about writing, they would be more likely to engage in agentic writing behaviors. That said, the SAGA model may allow for the possibility that students, especially in the high-pressure, high-performance context for the study began the intervention compliant with, if not comfortable with, agentic writing behaviors but skeptical or unaware of agentic writing beliefs. I hypothesized at the outset of this study that espousal of agentic writing beliefs would enhance students' engagement in these behaviors, taking them beyond performances that were required or expected and transforming them into sincere, thoughtful engagements in pursuit of agentic writer identity.

Here I called on a branch of identity theory, Possible Selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986) to justify my intervention. Possible Selves theory holds that individuals are constantly considering a menu of representations of self that are both different from past and current self and constricted by those same selves. Anecdotally speaking, in my

experience sophomores are somewhat obsessed with possible selves: they imagine, write about, and discuss future club memberships, college selections, and careers. A few list writer among their possible selves; however, by inviting (inciting?) students to engage in agentic writing behaviors, by exposing them to agentic writing beliefs, and by encouraging them to reflect on and negotiate their identities as writers, I asked all of them to add *writer* to their menu of possible selves.

Again, I do not mean writer here in the professional or artistic sense; rather my goal was to have students consider writer as hyphenate: physician-writer, teacher-writer, father-writer. Though developed in the context of professional identity development, Ibarra's (1999) Provisional Selves theory extended Possible Selves theory by arguing that "during times of career transition, as people identify role models, experiment with unfamiliar behaviors, and evaluate their progress,"—a list that in itself aptly describes the very business of being a teenager—"they are constructing possible identities" (p. 767) and that periods of transition prompt the generation of provisional, "even makeshift" (p. 767) identities that require rehearsal and refinement via practice and experience. Toward the end goal of students' adopting at least writer as a possible self, I used my intervention to facilitate their enacting writer as a provisional self.

Choice, Self-Reflection, and Mindset

Choice. My study was by no means the first to identify student choice as a means of effecting desirable outcomes. Drawing on self-determination theory as well, Guthrie and Klauda (2014) presented a study in which a interdisciplinary Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) model was implemented with a group of middle-school students using four motivational-engagement supports, the second of which was student-

driven choice. Investigating students' achievement, motivations, and engagement, Guthrie and Klauda (2014) attempted to untangle which motivational supports—among them, choice to improve intrinsic motivation on the part of the students—had the most evident effect on those desired outcomes. Guthrie and Klauda (2014) operationalized choice as "self-selection of books or sections of books, inviting student input into subtopics of study, providing options for demonstrating learning, and self-selecting partners for reading" (p. 395). Guthrie and Klauda (2014) argued that "choice has rarely been studied as an experimental variable in classroom motivation studies" (p. 406). Much like my own three-strand innovation, Guthrie and Klauda (2014) suggested the "benefits of choice combined with other motivational supports for increasing a composite of motivations" (p. 406).

In an empirical study among high school science students, Patall, Vasquez, Steingut, Trimble, and Pituch (2016) collected daily student reports of classroom experiences, which the researchers analyzed in terms of behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, and agentic engagement. Patall, Vasquez, Steingut, Trimble, and Pituch (2016) argued that the provision of choice can "trigger a sequence in which students' interest-based motivation may lead to engagement and learning" (p. 182). The use of the words "trigger" and "sequence" here were evocative of my own early considerations of the previously mentioned "chicken and egg" quandary. Patall, Vasquez, Steingut, Trimble, and Pituch (2016) suggested that choice triggers motivation, which leads to engagement and learning; however, their study also went on to detail how student *perception* of choice—note that perception of choice is not the same thing as provision of choice; if a teacher believes she is offering a choice but the student does not

feel that he is actually being invited to make an authentic choice, it does not feel like choice to the student—affected subsequent affective states and behaviors on the part of the student as well as subsequent behaviors and supports from the teacher. And the cycle continued. Awareness of the necessity that students be aware of the availability of choices and of themselves as choosers led me to the next strand of the innovation, self-reflection, which in this study takes the form of student journals.

Self-Reflection. In much of the literature on best practices for writing instruction, the term self-reflection has been discussed in tandem with self-assessment (Nielsen, 2012; Boud, Lawson, & Thompson, 2013). The two terms describe two related, but different, processes, however: Reflection asks that one consider, weigh, remember, observe, and interpret; assessment invites evaluation. As a teacher, the difference between these two processes is vividly clear. When I drive home and think about Runa's comments that she is not a writer, I am reflecting. When I am required to assign a grade to her essay, I am assessing. The self-reflection I invited my students to do as part of this innovation was wholly unrelated to assessment. Certainly, of course, some students found it difficult to self-reflect without self-assessing. But unlike an exercise in which a teacher asks students to assign grades to their own work, or complete a rubric or score sheet, I asked my students to do nothing of the sort.

Nielsen (2012) proposed three essential groupings of self-assessment practices in the writing classroom, including self-assessment in response to specific prompts and cues (e.g., use of revision checklists, use of rubrics); open-ended reflection on writing (e.g., memo writing in response to drafts, journal writing about an essay, written justification of a grade); and oral presentation or sharing of writing to a peer or group (e.g., verbal

justification of grade, explanation of an essay to a peer or class, oral presentation). It is the second of Nielsen's (2012) groupings with which I am concerned in the current study, with one modification: Students in the current study were never asked to provide a written justification of a grade. Much of the work on which they reflected was ungraded in the first place. Those students who discussed grades did so voluntarily, and this tendency was observed throughout the coding process.

From this foundational definition of self-reflection, then, it is explicitly evident that the second strand of the innovation, self-reflection, was intimately related to the third, mindset. To invite students to examine their own mindsets is to invite them to think about thinking—that is, it is a metacognitive activity. Consider here Runa's discussion of what she frequently does in her writing (get Squonky) and her theorizing as to why she does so as well as her argument for the value of rehearsing Squonkiness in writing so she will be prepared for Squonky situations. Desautel (2009) argued that "self-reflection serves the goal of constructing metacognitive knowledge by making formerly unconscious, intangible, or reflexive processes or events explicit" (p. 2001).

Mindset. For the current study, mindset was chosen as the particular metacognitive topic to serve the central module or theme. In order to invite students to begin (or further develop their ability) to think of themselves as thinkers and learners, it was crucial to engage them in metacognition—that is, thinking about their thinking. To that end, a set of activities around the concept of mindset was implemented during the data-collection period. More detail about the form those activities took can be found in Chapter 3. Here, some discussion will be devoted to the literature behind mindset to make explicit the justification for mindset as the third strand of the innovation.

According to Desautel (2009), metacognition is "a process that happens when individuals consider their own thinking and use regulatory strategies to reinforce or alter that thinking"(p. 2000). Notable in this explanation of metacognition is the emphasis first on thinking about thinking, necessarily activating belief, then the emphasis on action derived from that thinking. Desautel (2009) went on to point out that metacognition can inform an isolated, "task-oriented situation and the thinkers' more global conceptions of themselves as thinkers and learners" (p. 2000) (e.g., identity). Metacognition is a broad and complex area of study, and the three-strand innovation under discussion here featured only a small metacognitive subtopic. Here I will defend the choice to feature mindset as the metacognitive strand with this population in this context.

Mindset, a popular area of study spearheaded by the work of Dweck (1999, 2012) that has recently invigorated approaches to curriculum and pedagogy, has been described as a person's "basic beliefs about learning and ability" (Ravenscroft, Waymire, & West, 2012). Although mindset is a complex and intricate subject, it is relatively simple to explain and easy for adolescents and children to understand. Furthermore, mindset was chosen as the third innovation strand for this research project because of some of the aspects of the setting described in Chapter 1. The reader will recall that the School was described as a competitive, achievement-oriented environment. My own anecdotal experience of the student (and parent) body over the eight years preceding the current study has suggested to me that there is a strong current of fixed-mindedness in the school community—an eagerness on the part of students to demonstrate their intelligence (an eagerness bolstered by messaging from home and from school) as well as a focus on self-image and self-preservation.

Of course, I have also observed many students and families with growth mindsets, those who have learning as their primary goal and who believe that "over time, with effort, persistence, and hard work, intelligence and other abilities can be developed" (Grant & Dweck, 2003; Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Dweck, 1999, 2006, cited in Sliwka & Yee, 2015). In fact, it is because the population is in my view quite mixed in mindset that I thought the topic would be titillating and appealing for my students, provoking lively conversation and debate.

Finally, mindset was chosen as the third strand of the innovation because of the elegant way that it dovetails with the underlying constructs of the study, behavior, identity, and belief. According to mindset theory, what one believes about learning—and about him or herself—can "inspire a chain of thoughts and behaviors" that are different from performance goals. It is evident, then, that within the topic of mindset, the constructs of behavior, belief, and identity are all bound up in one another.

I have continually referred to the innovation at the center of this action research project as a three-strand innovation. By this I have meant the three strands of the innovation implemented with the population, i.e., choice, self-reflection, and mindset. Though I have unbraided the strands here to consider each, and a theoretical backing for each, separately, they are not truly so easily separated. Furthermore, the constructs I imagine underlying agentic writer identity are no less braided into each other, and then the two braids (three-strand construct and three-strand innovation) are twisted into one another.

It is in Gee's (2003) work in semiotic domains that the doubly braided nature of my three underlying constructs—behavior, identity, and belief—and the three-strand

innovation—choice, self-reflection, and mindset—within the semiotic domain of the writing classroom becomes clear. Per Gee (2003), the "content" of any semiotic domain—by this he meant the "facts, theories, principles" associated with the domain, academic disciplines included—"gets made in history by real people and their social interactions. They build that content in certain ways because of the *people they are* (socially, historically, culturally), *the beliefs and values they share*, and *their shared ways of talking, interacting, and viewing* the world" (p. 28) (emphasis mine). When my students made choices; when they engaged in self-reflection and produced a tangible product of it; and when they considered, discussed, demonstrated, questioned, and refashioned their mindsets, they were working within a particular semiotic domain and they were drawing on behavior, identity, and belief to do so.

Narrative identity. Before pivoting to the literature informing the choice of methodology, narrative inquiry, it is important to incorporate a final related concept drawn from identity research, namely the concept of narrative identity, which is relevant to the theoretical underpinnings of the inquiry, the means by which I will be attempting to foster students' agentic writer identities (the innovation), and the methodology I have selected with which to make my investigations. Recall that the three strands of the "innovation braid" were choice, self-reflection, and mindset, to be discussed at length in the next section. According to the narrative identity model, identity is formed—and reformed—through a process of storying interactions between the self and others. Those who accept and work within the narrative identity framework argue that

> through repeated interactions with others, stories about personal experiences are processed, edited, reinterpreted, retold, and subjected to a range of social and

> discursive influences, as the storyteller gradually develops a broader and more integrative identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 235).

Storying, then, is the process by which individuals make sense of their experiences by crafting them into coherent narrative arcs. This framework is certainly closely tied to the tenets of self-determination theory discussed previously, particularly in the need for others (connectedness) as well as individual authority over one's manipulations of one's own story (autonomy). Here, too, are echoes of possible selves and provisional selves theories, in central tenet of narrative identity: "selves create stories, which in turn create selves" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 235).

Narrative identity is an especially apt and exciting theory for the current research.n To recap: In this study, a writer has undertaken to examine adolescents' negotiation of agentic writer identity by way of the narratives those students produce, which she then formed into narratives as she fulfilled the requirements of the ultimate writing assignment, one that fit the narrative she told about herself as a writer and student.

This framework is especially relevant because, per McAdams and McLean (2013), it is in adolescence that people begin to form coherent narrative identities, because of both individual cognitive/developmental processes (increasingly mature operational thinking, increased ability to think abstractly about the self, increased ability to acknowledge and entertain tension and paradox) and social processes (the expectation that you know who you are, how you got that way, and where you are going, which we ask of adults more than of children).

All of this was happening in my students the year they were with me. Operating from the narrative identity framework certainly added weight, if not gravity, to a claim like Runa's—"I am not a talented writer"—and made my response, as her teacher, even more crucial. That response, as well as more discussion of narrative identity as a framework, will emerge in Chapter 5 as I discuss the narrative inquiry process and "results." For now, we will continue the thread of narrative into a discussion of the chosen methodology, narrative inquiry.

Narrative Inquiry

In this section, a foundational justification for a predominantly qualitative study design will be discussed, including a brief recapitulation of the current innovation and the research questions. Next I will move to a defense of the specific qualitative approach chosen for the study—narrative inquiry—in which I will thoroughly review the theoretical and historical origins of the approach. The methodological structure of data collection and data analysis will be justified using the relevant qualitative research theories and epistemological stances of narrative inquiry. Finally, the section will conclude with a discussion of the narrative form the author-researcher has chosen for the presentation of her results, the saga.

Why a Qualitative Line of Inquiry? The three-strand intervention described here comprised a) a curriculum rich in student choice (e.g., in reading texts, writing topic and style, feedback method, and assessment format) and b) ongoing instruction in mindset in order to create an agentic identity–conducive writing space for all students. As discussed in the preceding chapter, learning how to write entails more than the development of a set of technical proficiencies and practices; rather, learning to write—

like all learning—involves construction of identity. Specifically, students learning to write are engaged in "a type of identity work through participation in and negotiation of various and potentially competing literacy practices (i.e., ways of understanding, valuing, and using text across academic disciplines)" (Ouellette, 2008, p. 257). Scholars have variously conceived of identity as laminations, or layers (Holland & Lave, 2001, cited in Moje et al., 2009); cubes; or quilts (Moje et al., 2009). These figurative conceptions of identity are useful in the research at hand, which aimed to examine students' negotiation, composition, and representation of their identities as writers.

Common among of these metaphoric conceptions of identity has been a rejection of identity as a fixed, essential entity in favor of a conception of identity as multifaceted, socially mediated, sometimes contradictory, and fluid. As such, research into students' identities, specifically their identities as writers, has necessitated a qualitative, non-positivist stance. The research questions that undergirded this research were descriptive and exploratory in nature, and they—with the exception of the last question, which focused on the methodological approach—sought to explore students' own perceptions and conceptions of themselves as writers.

Epistemologically and logistically speaking, it would be neither acceptable nor fruitful to "measure" students' writer identities at the beginning of the data-collection period and then "measure" them again at the end, one short semester later. Identity is not static, linear, or tidy enough for such an approach. At best, a pre- and post-test of agentic writer identity would capture two snapshots of students' embrace (or disavowal) of identity at two points in time, but one would not then be able to connect those snapshots with a line and say, "There. See? Identity went up/down." This is not to say that a

comparison of those two snapshots would not be interesting or useful for *something,* only that it would not be useful for the current research study, given the research questions and theoretical frameworks that support it. As Watzlawik (2014) pointed out, adolescents' narratives of their identities are highly dynamic—a moving target described by a moving narrator.

Therefore, I hoped to collect a rich set of data of students' negotiations (written and verbal) of their own writer identities within the temporally constricted period of data collection—one semester in a young, rapidly developing young life—with the intention of creating a set of narrative analyses. These narratives in composite and in interplay with one another yielded a complex anthology of insights into students' development of writer identity when those students study writing in a choice-rich environment that features self-reflection and instruction in mindset.

Furthermore, the analysis and presentation of the data was mimetic of the innovation itself, in that the data were presented in written, specifically fictional, narrative form. Specifically, portraits of students' negotiation of agentic writer identity were presented in the form of original short sagas composed by the author-researcher and informed by iterations of qualitative analysis. Using a technique akin to what Leavy (2015) calls fictional ethnography, students' representations of their own narratives were further investigated and represented in writing by my composition of a set, or anthology, of interlaced sagas to represent the collective and individual pursuit of writer identity among my students. This decidedly qualitative approach was not only permitted by the research design but necessitated by the issues at its center: I was encouraging my students to take writing risks; command language, genre, form, and style to their self-determined

authorial ends; and to use writing in authentic, self-directed ways to investigate questions of personal relevance and construct new knowledge. Therefore, it was appropriate that I myself do all of those things with this dissertation, arguably my ultimate academic writing assignment. I attempted here to use writing to make my own sense of my students' experiences, not merely to transmit what they told me.

To preface my defense of my choice of narrative inquiry as a suitable methodology for my research, I will begin by giving an overview of the origins of narrative inquiry as a reaction to reigning positivism in the sciences, including the social sciences. This section will include a discussion of the epistemological givens in narrative inquiry, and in subsequent sections I will endeavor to explicitly link back to these values and stances to demonstrate how they are operationalized in narrative inquiry. Since my own research interests are located in education contexts, I will also in this section establish narrative inquiry's particular relevance to that field (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Barone, 2007) as well as the particular relevance of narrative inquiry to studies concerned with identity development.

I will further narrow the field of discussion from narrative inquiry to a type of narrative inquiry, what Leavy (2015) called fictional ethnography. The method and procedure of fictional ethnography will be discussed in a theoretical, as opposed to logistical, manner. Please refer to Chapter 3 for clear explication of the study's setting and participants, instruments, and procedure.

Because narrative inquiry has not been without its detractors, and because there are many valid questions about the utility of narrative inquiry, I will discuss criticisms of

narrative inquiry as well as researchers' suggestions for how a narrative researcher can work to minimize the ethical and intellectual threats.

Finally I will discuss the specific narrative form I chose for my study, the saga. Though I made this selection before collecting data or engaging in restorying, throughout the process I sincerely and authentically engaged with and reflected on my participants and their stories to determine whether this genre choice was true to the lived experiences of the participants as I understood them. I will conclude this section with a consideration of the role of the researcher in light of the supporting literature and the chosen methodology.

Origins and Tenets of Narrative Inquiry. A fascination with stories has been braided into English conversational phraseology, evidence that narrative has been an important way that individuals make sense of their experiences and identities (Polkinghorne, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Savin-Baden & van Niekerk, 2007):

"What's your story?"

"It's the story of my life."

"That's my story and I'm sticking to it."

Narratives are ubiquitous, accessible, and natural—beginning around age 3 or 4, children begin to tell stories (Stadler & Ward, 2005; Applebee, 1978). But narratives are necessarily language-based, and therefore potentially problematic: We must package our experiences in words, which have the ability to clarify and distort, amplify and mute meaning (Denzin, 1997; Polkinghorne, 2007), rendering even simple-seeming stories prismatic, complex, and subject to multiple interpretations.

Story, used here interchangeably with *narrative* (though that choice is not without its problems to be discussed later), is the currency of narrative inquiry, a branch of qualitative social-science research that emerged in what Polkinghorne (2007) calls a "reform movement" around the 1970s (p. 472), challenging dominant beliefs about what counts as evidence, knowledge, and even science (Polkinghorne, 2007; Hendry, 2010). Researchers working in narrative inquiry have dealt in stories, both collecting and analyzing the narratives of others (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Denzin, 1997; Savin-Baden & van Niekerk, 2007) and as a methodological approach to constructing meaning out of collected data by composing original narratives (Barone, 2007;Polkinghorne, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Savin-Baden & van Niekerk, 2007). Narrative inquiry has been simultaneously phenomenon and method (Knight, 2009; Denzin, 1997; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Savin-Baden & van Niekerk, 2007). Narrative inquiry emerged out of, and requires, a particular epistemology—a narrative way of knowing.

Relevance to Education, Identity, and Agency. Narrative inquiry has had a special relevance to certain fields and disciplines, among them education. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), education is at its heart a distinctly human—and therefore story-centric—pursuit wherein teachers and learners both are constantly concerned with "construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories" (p. 2). Somewhat less sunnily, Barone (2007) argued that narrative inquiry has a special place in educational research because of overwhelming trends toward and demands for scientifically based research in education—the empirical, gold-standard type of "hard" science that begat the No Child Left Behind Act and high-stakes tests. Barone (2007), a proponent of narrative analysis, agitated against the federally sanctioned narrowing of

what is considered valid inquiry in education, seeking not to see narrative inquiry eclipse gold-standard approaches but to exist alongside them.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) also pointed out the particular relevance of narrative inquiry to identity development using language that sounds strikingly similar to possible selves theory. They asserted that researchers have reason to be taken by the complexity of participants' narratives because "a life is ... a matter of growth toward an imagined future and, therefore, involves retelling stories and attempts at reliving stories" (p. 4). Knight (2009) suggested that the act of composing narrative "allows us to look into the future and imagine something different or better," (p. 50), more language that evokes possible selves theory.

Smith (2009), citing McAdams (1989), invoked the simultaneity and fluidity of identity in his discussion of "imagoes," or "the various characters, the 'mes' within me, who play leading roles in various parts of one's life story" (p. 605). Like identity itself, no imago can capture an entire person. Like identities, imagoes are context-dependent and shifting, and they collapse combine in our efforts to compose our life narratives. Finally, Savin-Baden and van Niekerk (2007) argued that researchers should eschew "causality, consistency, and linearity" as the only means of managing reality, instead embracing the "hesitance, circularity, and incoherence" of narrative. Certainly the body of literature on identity theory has been consistent in its assertion that identity development, like narrative, is circular, hesitant, and at times incoherent, and rarely neatly causal, consistent, or linear. For all the above reasons, narrative inquiry is a suitable approach for a study that seeks to examine identity development—in this case, development of writer identity.

Narrative inquiry is also well-suited to a study that operates on the concept of agency, as did my study. As Knight (2009) pointed out, inviting students to reflect, to turn their experiences into narratives, encourages them to re-examine and interrogate their stories to discover how experience shapes beliefs and behavior. According to Knight (2009), "new insights into *why* they may act as they do in the classroom have the potential to give students a greater sense of agency" (p. 49). This kind of reflection toward agency is what I hoped participants in my study would gain from their reflective journals.

Fictional Ethnography. Fictional ethnography refers to the use of fictional writing to engage with and present the realities of other people. In fictional ethnography, the "researcher reflexively create[s] reality in the act of writing, and actively invent[s] cultures as opposed to representing them" (Grant, 2010). There are many different approaches to narrative inquiry. Though all of them share certain epistemological features, such as a rejection of empirical, measurable features as the only, or best, ways of understanding phenomena, the particulars of narrative study design can vary. In fact, differences of opinion emerge even before one arrives at study design: indeed, the language used to describe study designs and procedures also lacks firm consensus. As mentioned previously, Barone (2007) elected to use the term "narrative construction" in lieu of what others have called "narrative analysis." In the face of such nuanced disagreement, a researcher must be explicit about how she is using contested terms and which methods and tools she collects under her chosen label, as I will do here.

Fictional ethnography is distinct from both fiction and ethnography (Leavy, 2015), yet ethnography and fiction are not mutually exclusive (Hecht, 2007). Fictional

ethnography can best be understood as a form of ethnography that employs structural and aesthetic aspects most often associated with fiction (e.g., plot, characterization, dialogue, genre, figurative language) (Leavy, 2015) but with the intention of disseminating information, findings, or research-informed assertions. That is, fictional ethnography has a pedagogical function, whereas fiction—as instructive as readers may find it—need not.

Fictional ethnography, according to its proponents, allows researchers to extend their findings to audiences wider than the traditional academic realm and invites readers to engage more deeply and self-reflectively than they might with orthodox ethnographic results. According to Frank (2000), who employed what she calls "ethnographically grounded fiction" (p. 481), understood to be Leavy's (2015) "fictional ethnography" (p. 60), the technique enables both reader and researcher to enjoy "multiple, dynamic, and 'messy' interpretations" of the findings. Hecht (2007) argued that ethnography is limited by its necessary otherness, its aboutness, its external nature: "It can go almost anywhere except, of course, into the mind of another person" (p. 18). Fiction, on the other hand, is not limited can go into the mind of invented characters. In fact, fiction must.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Creswell (2013) laid out the procedural approach for a fictional ethnographic design, pointing out that there is no rigidly prescribed set or sequence of steps. Generally, a researcher's first step must be to consider whether her area of inquiry is suited to a narrative approach, as I hope to have done here. Next she must identify a sample population, typically a small sample, and collect their narratives through multiple methods. In the next section, I will describe the multiple data-collection tools I used, both verbal and written, to elicit my participants' narratives. Third, the researcher uses coding techniques to examine the results for

thematic elements that arise from the stories as well as narrative features (e.g., events, characters, conflicts, epiphanies, turning points, resolutions) and "microlinguistic" units of discourse—that is, particular words or utterances that appear (Creswell, 2013, p. 75). Finally, the researcher engages in the act of "restorying," or reorganizing the stories into a framework, shaping the narrative arc and identifying causal links between events.

Duff (2002) was careful to point out that narrative inquiry, of which fictional ethnography is a type, "requires going beyond the use of narrative as a rhetorical structure" (p. 208). Through the process of "restorying," the researcher goes beyond the narratives the participants provide or are even aware of; she probes for the underlying structures—the stories behind and between the participants' stories—and constructs those narratively.

Crucially, the process of restorying is more than a novel means of presenting the findings—it is in itself a process of *finding* the findings. By loosening participants from their actual lives via the use of fictional techniques, the researcher is afforded ability and mobility that other methods do not provide. Once fictionalized, a participant can be manipulated (here taken to mean moved or examined from multiple angles) in ways that reveal insight, parallels, tensions, similarities that may not have revealed themselves in the field texts on their own. Furthermore, the act of restorying puts the researcher in play in the research in a way that may appear paradoxical: She is simultaneously centralized, as she is having her fictionalizing way with the subjects, but she is also muted—the act of restorying, as opposed to presenting subjects as supposedly objective, transparent representations of their actual selves, is intended to humanize and complicate the

subjects, to reject the flattening that can result from more seemingly objective approaches to the presentation of data.

Role of the Researcher. As is often the case in action research associated with CPED-affiliated doctoral programs, the researcher in this case is also a constituent in the context. Specifically, I was at once the students' sophomore English teacher (at the time of this writing, the sole sophomore English teacher, a role that is expected to be preserved for the study term) and the researcher. This dual role afforded me a simultaneous insider-outsider status, one that ultimately justified my choice of saga as the narrative approach. As discussed previously, the sagas of the Icelanders featured stories of Vikings written down by their descendants—that is, stories about one group's experiences written down by people who did not themselves have those experiences but who share a kinship, a history, and a lineage with those earlier people. I will briefly, and in a somewhat oscillating manner, discuss my simultaneous insider-outsider status in my research setting.

I was an insider because at the time of intervention and data collection, I was in my ninth year of employment at the School. In fact, at that time, I was the English department faculty member with the second-longest tenure at the School. The School, as discussed previously, was small and intimate; nine years of employment as the sophomore English teacher meant that I was knowledgeable about school culture and values, both formally articulated and informally enacted. There was a dimension of exclusivity in the School culture, not just as far as accepted/enrolled students but also among employed teachers—an often unspoken sense that we were privy to an understanding of the school that contradicts what those in the wider community think or

assume, and a possibly unjustified assumption that other teachers would like to have jobs like ours.

Nevertheless, I was also simultaneously an outsider, both to independent school culture and to the culture of the students whose experiences I hoped to explore and document in my research. I was myself the product not of rarefied or exclusive private schools but large, East Coast public schools. I had never met or heard of a "college counselor" until I began working at the School. I was the bearer of multiple degrees from a state university, not of degrees from the elite private colleges many of my students' parents attended or to which my students themselves often aspire. In my upbringing and adult life, I was and am middle-class; many (but not all) of my students hailed from extraordinarily wealthy homes.

I was also an outsider to my students' experiences as writers because I was their teacher and the primary provider of feedback on their writing. As the one who provided feedback (and grades), I was endowed with more power in our relationship, at least within our institutional practices. Though I endeavored to treat my students with respect, to avoid micromanaging them, and to resist impulses to overstep and intrude on their agency as people (I did not require them to ask for permission to use the restroom, for example), the fact remained that they addressed me by last name while I addressed them by first names; they had to meet my deadlines but had no recourse if I took a week longer returning their papers to them.

However, in one very important regard I was also an insider: I am myself a writer, an identity I claim without reservation and that I candidly share increasingly with my students. Before undertaking the doctoral program for which I completed this action

research, I did not possess any formal degrees in education; my master's degree was a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. I have positioned myself to my students as a fellow writer (e.g., I did in-class journal writing alongside them, my diplomas were on the wall, and there was a small but plainly visible shelf in the classroom where I displayed my published works), and I was quite open about sharing my own agentic writing beliefs and behaviors (e.g., I shared with them when I discovered new understandings or opinions through writing; when I received brutal feedback on my writing from a peer or teacher; when I submitted my work for publication and was rejected or accepted; when my was is published; when I was asked by an agent or editor to make substantial revisions or cuts). I did not think or talk of myself as a "better" writer than my students, only a more experienced one.

The preceding discussion of the role of the researcher—including what might strike some readers as self-indulgent or irrelevant discussion of my own writing—is crucially relevant to the study at hand insofar as I was preoccupied with students' development of writer identity and operated on the assumption (informed by theory) that writing is a valid and valuable way of making meaning. A dissertation is an exercise in constructing new meaning through writing. Although certain aspects of the process and product of the dissertation were constrained or prescribed by the institutions associated with it, the undertaking was ultimately elective, and it was my own. Therefore, it was permissible and eminently appropriate that I exercise my agency as a writer in the completion of this task by continuously examining the effects on my own beliefs, behaviors, and writer identity as I worked through the research. I made no attempt to minimize myself in this research. Writing my way to an understanding of myself as a

writer was inseparable from writing my way to an understanding of my students and my students' understandings of themselves as writers.

Further, I endorse the view that "identity is present in all writing" (Williams, 2006, p. 712) and that, acknowledged or not, my creation of a doctoral dissertation is an exercise in the negotiation of my own writer identity—a negotiation that is, perhaps, the work's ultimate value. In the same manner that in my study I aimed to position the student as the chooser of texts, genres, formats, media, and process steps in writing and in so doing invite the student to consider and examine his or her identity, I intended to make the same demands—and extend the same freedoms—to myself as I undertook this dissertation, arguably one of the most significant writing tasks of my life.

Narrative Inquiry: Criticism. Of course, narrative inquiry presents logistical, ethical, and intellectual concerns that the narrative researcher must address. Of these three categories of concerns, one, logistical, entails a mandate that the narrative researcher—like any researcher—ensure that her chosen methodology is suitable to her research questions, study context, participants, timeline, resources, and capability. The question of "validity" was raised and discussed in the preceding section regarding the epistemological roots of narrative inquiry—the rejection of quantifiable, empirical, gold-standard research as the best, or only, way of understanding human phenomena. Therefore, this section will address the primary concerns about the peculiar ethical concerns raised by a narrative researcher's attempts to make stories out of others' experiences and then present those as social science.

Narrative inquiry necessarily means that the researcher will compose, construct, and invent a narrative derived from her collected field texts (data) and her analysis of

those texts. The narrative researcher acknowledges that she attempts to interpret the narratives that underpin and inform the stories her participants share with her; in this manner, the researcher is claiming to be able to see in participants' lives things they cannot, will not, or do not acknowledge for themselves—and then to present these findings as "research," which grants her interpretation a badge of validity or seriousness, if not "truth." She wields a "societal privilege" (Smith, 2009, p. 606) that her participants lack.

Furthermore, researchers have what Smith (2009) called "authorial surplus" (p. 606): they have the ability and, perhaps, the inclination to direct readers to the same interpretations of the data that the researcher herself privileges. Far from inviting a plurality of interpretations and welcoming dissonance as narrative researchers claim to do, argued Smith (2009), narrative researchers too often use the lure of narrative to direct readers toward a "coherent, albeit implied, point or theme" (p. 606). At best, doing so amounts to narrow-minded, weak research; at worst—particularly with vulnerable populations—it amounts to a co-opting or erasure of others' experiences and a kind of narrative violence.

Smith (2009) argued that narrative researchers furthermore obscure the "constructedness" (p. 606) of their research; they do not often enough reveal their methodological choices and moves to allow the researcher to consider them independently and evaluate the findings. Coulter and Smith (1990) advocated for an approach to narrative inquiry that emphasized an ongoing, collaborative process, one in which the researcher's and the participants' voices were heard. Such an approach necessitated member-checks not only at the final result, but at several stages throughout

the process. In narrative inquiry, the researcher acknowledges that she and her participants are co-constructing understanding. Smith (2009), though critical, was not dismissive of narrative inquiry. He advocated that narrative researchers present thorough, explicit methodological information, such as sample analytic memos, transcripts, and code sheets, in an appendix or online to accompany the published research.

Restorying. It is crucial to me (epistemologically, personally, pedagogically) to remember, always, that my students are, as am I, in the midst of long and complex lives, and that I am their teacher for a mere blip. They do not arrive on the doorstep of 10th grade as clean slates, nor will their identities, beliefs, or behaviors around writing be galvanized or frozen, for better or for worse, by anything I do or say. This is not to say that our interactions with one another are not, or cannot be, profound or life-changing, for them or for me, or that our engagement with one another is so fleeting as to be unworthy of serious study. Rather, emphasizing the continuity—the pasts we have and the futures we anticipate—serves to remind the reader that I am required to choose a presentation for the results of my serious study that refuses to "say that people, places, and things are this way or that but that they have a narrative history and are moving forward" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 145). It is likewise important to recall that as the teacher-researcher, I cannot be neatly extracted from the study as a coolly detached observer. For those two reasons, I was led to narrative inquiry in general, to the subset "fictional ethnography" in specific, and to a method known as "restorying" as my method.

Drawing from Clandinin and Connelley (2000), Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) offered a distillation of the three steps of narrative inquiry as reading the field texts (transcripts, journals, memos, etc.); "analyzing this story to understand the lived

experiences" (p. 330); and retelling, or restorying. Lieblich et al. (1998) further organized these general steps into four types, or modes, of narrative inquiry: holistic-content, holistic-form, categorical-content, and categorical-form. It is the holistic-content type, recognizable by many in familiar case-study approaches, with which I am concerned here, as in the holistic-content mode of narrative inquiry the researcher searches for meaning in parts (transcript sections, journal excerpts) in light of the whole. In doing so, the narrative researcher creates a story of the participant, a "reconstituted story," (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 332) that collapses the participant's past, present, and future into a specific setting and context.

Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) further elucidated the process of holistic-content restorying by detailing two processes: a problem-solution narrative structure, in which the researcher organizes the field texts around selected participants, a concrete objective, specific attempts on the part of the participants to resolve the objective, and the final solution. I rejected this model because the constructing of agentic writer identity was not a discrete problem to be solved, nor was a solution to it possible in the timeframe with which I was working with my participants.

Instead, I opted for Ollerenshaw and Creswell's (2002) second model, the three-dimensional-space approach, which derived more explicitly from Clandinin and Connelly (2000), whom I have already positioned as central to my thinking and research design. In this approach, the researcher in composing her narrative considers the participants from both a personal and a social perspective, examining their self-reported experiences as well as their interactions with other people, respects her participants' continuity, and carefully considers situation and place (e.g., the way students talk about writing identity

with their writing teacher in the very classroom where yesterday they had an uncomfortable peer-review experience matters in understanding the participant and in constructing the narrative). Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) helpfully offered a graphic organizer for each approach. I availed myself of the techniques they suggested for the three-dimensional-space approach to narrative inquiry, and I will explain these in detail in the method section.

The Norse Saga

Leavy (2015) provided a useful distinction between narrative inquiry and fiction-based research but argues that neither is especially new or marginal. In fact, concerned as the social sciences are with the complexity and non-objectification of human subjects, narrative approaches can enable researchers to honor those tenets. Furthermore, narrative approaches can make important research palatable and accessible to wide, non-academic audiences. Leavy (2015) also argued that fiction-based research has a special relationship to and relevance in the area of identity research. For all of these reasons, I chose a narrative, fiction-based, approach for the analysis of her field texts and presentation of the results. The final research took the form of an anthology of interrelated sagas, each of which on its own depicted the individual journey a participant student has taken or is taken in his or negotiation of agentic writer identity. The sagas overlapped and interrelated through the use of a shared landscape (the fictionalized context of our class/school landscape) and recurring characters, made in composite to represent shared individuals, experiences, or figures: a powerful, critical, teacher. A supportive parent. The trial of the SAT.

The word "saga" means, literally, "narrative" and comes from the verb "to say." (Hermann, 2013, p. 340-341). The study included students' verbal compositions of their writing identity histories as well as their written negotiations of the same. In fact, the sequencing of the data-collection methods was also justified in the choice of saga form, as the saga "is likely to have first taken shape as an orally generated and transmitted form which sometimes … acquired a written existence" (Ross, 2010, p. 13). Sagas straddle fact and fiction, history and fantasy: "sagas are both [creative literature and history] … Icelandic prose storytelling was a form of ethnographic expression that allowed authorial creativity while retaining its roots in historical tradition" (Byock, 2004, p. 303). As students negotiated their writer identities, they had one foot in their pasts and another in their futures. They composed their identities from experiences both real and imagined. Furthermore, the choice of saga as opposed to some other creative form (novel, short story, play) was in itself a defense of the utility and legitimacy of qualitative inquiry and representation. In the medieval world, "sagas were not reduced to ornamentation, but were a valuable means for transmitting cultural heritage" (Hermann, 2013, p. 345).

Sagas also include several distinguishing features and formal elements that made them a form well-suited to the particular questions at the heart of this research. Sagas include multiple narrative forms: prose and poetry, fantasy and history—allowing the author to shift the how of the telling to best suit the tale being told (Ericksen, 2004). The study was about (writerly) identity, and sagas often include issues of identity, if not crises of identity—and in these moments, identity is depicted not neatly or linearly but with "to-and-fro-ness" (Friedman qtd. in Waugh, 2011, p. 309). As suggested by the imaginary circular SAGA model, even a student who, per the SAWBIB, appeared "fully agentic" in

his or her writing at the outset of the data collection term might have experienced some to-and-fro-ness as that identity was forged, challenged, reinforced, and explored throughout our semester/year together.

Furthermore, sagas themselves have a special relationship to thinking, memory, and history writ large, which is mirrored nicely but on a smaller scale with the study's preoccupation with the relationship between students' writing and their thinking, their memories, their history (as individuals and as a community of writers within our school): According to Hermann (2013), "writing was a relatively new medium in the Norse world at the time when the first sagas were written. … [T]his new medium was welcomed as an aid to memory" but soon went beyond "additional storage room" to become an "interpretive activity among groups of people, who not merely preserved (i.e., repeated) memories, but also interpreted and altered memories of the past" (p. 334).

Related to this point is the fact that the time period depicted in the sagas is several centuries removed from the time when they were written down. That temporal distance is not unlike the temporal distance that is implicit in my data-collection endeavors for this study: Students told me about their childhoods, their past school experiences, etc., experiences which in many cases took place years before the day that the student sat down with me to put it into words. Just like the saga-writers were reinterpreting, reliving, and reimagining their centuries-old pasts when they wrote the sagas, my students were reinterpreting, reliving, and reimagining their pasts, and their identities, as writers as they spoke to me or constructed journal reflections. And when I set out to tell the reader the story of the action research I undertook last year, to put it in writing, I was reinterpreting, reliving, and reimagining my past and my identity as a writer, teacher, and researcher.

Sagas are intertextual, and intertextuality is crucial to sagas—"texts always come from other texts" (Hermann, 2013, p. 335). "Oral and written sagas co-existed and mutually influenced each other," (Hermann, 2013, p. 336), much in the same way that my students' interviews, discussion groups, journals, and formal writing did. Ultimately, it is the my hope that the saga form allowed me to tap into and represent students' negotiation of writer identity that are the basis of her inquiry: both the sense of questing and pursuit that I heard in the words my students use to discuss their futures as well as the long histories, the traumas and triumphs, they have already experienced.

A final note on my choice of Viking sagas, which will lead into my acknowledgement of my own role and positionality to the research. Let me tell you a story:

My family descends from Norway, and all my life I have felt a gentle tug (curiosity? A homing impulse?) in the direction of the Arctic Circle. I was in the third grade the first time I tried to teach myself Norwegian. During my completion of this research, I traveled with my family to Norway for the first time. On one chilly summer day, we trekked to a lush farm beside a fjord, where the family homestead of my forbear, my namesake, Serine Sversvold, who alone among her many siblings emigrated to the United States, still stood. The relatives descended from the forbear who *did not* move to America greeted us warmly, having hoisted (for the first time ever), an American flag alongside the Norwegian one.

They taught us a word—*dugnad*—which does not have an exact English translation. It means when a group of people in a community pool their efforts to solve problems and complete projects: cooking, cleaning, building. We spent the August

afternoon inside the old building, foreign beneficiaries of a true *dugnad*, cloaked in handknit Norwegian sweaters that a relative hauled out of her car's trunk for the shivering Americans. The Norwegians fed us, great spreads of coffee and beastings pudding. The room never quite grew dark, but it was dim, lit only by candles and the weak but constant midnight sun outside the windows. This trip reignited my passion for all things Norse, and I was lucky, since the Vikings were having something of a cultural "moment."

The BBC and the History channel have both aired, within the last five years, documentary and fictionalized series about the Vikings, inspired by the ancient saga texts. A book published during the last stretch of my research, *Beyond the Northlands: Viking Voyages and the Old Norse Sagas*, investigates the historical record as well as the copious legends and myths surrounding my ancestors' (admittedly fierce and violent) past. Celebrated author Neil Gaiman published his own "restorying" of Norse mythology just as I headed into the home stretch of my research. It seems clear that even people undescended from Vikings find them captivating. Ancient as the sagas are, the stories are compelling, exciting, altogether human, and utterly relatable. What reader does not delight at a saga character named "Ragnar Shaggy-breeches"? What writer does not wince with pleasurable recognition at a poet named "Audun the Uninspired," what teacher at a poet named "Eyvind the Plagiarist"? What person intimately acquainted with 15-year-olds does not turn immediately to "The Tale of Sarcastic Halli"?

Setting aside—but not completely ignoring or attempting to explain away—the Viking legacy of rape, pillage, marauding, and slavery, I am instead focusing here on

some aspects of Norse culture and way of life that contributed to my choice of genre/style for my narratives:

The sagas tell the stories of the Vikings: settlers, adventurers, explorers, and conquerers, mostly Norwegian, who settled Iceland in the 8th century. The sagas themselves were written down centuries later, in the 12th century. But many aspects of life in the saga age are not only admiration-worthy but aligned with my own classroom culture, a culture of its own within the school culture. The people of the sagas abided by a rigidly patriarchal structure, but in some important ways gender roles were more equal than in other European societies of the time. Like men of the sagas, women were expected to be honorable, courageous, and strong-willed (even if they could not have short hair or participate in the political or legal assemblies).

I also strive for gender equality in my formal and informal interactions with my students, but I acknowledge that they live in a world where gender roles are frustratingly fixed and women do not enjoy all the protections, liberties, and opportunities that men do—and this is to say nothing of my transgender students (the sagas make no mention of transgender people). In the sagas, women are sometimes magical, they are not supposed to use or like weapons, and they often work behind the scenes to drive men to do their bidding. Violence against women is particularly abhorred. These patterns, too, match some of the gender norms that informed my students' experiences of life and school, even if I tried not to reinforce them in my relatively small slice of their time. As will be evident in my original restoried sagas (Chapter 4), I have taken liberties with these saga-age gender norms. The reader will note that my sagas are also absent violence,

marauding, rape, or slaves. In this manner, I was "talking back" (hooks, 2014) to the sagas, and to patriarchy in my own community, through my own narrative inquiry.

The governmental structure of the saga age was marked by a rejection of "strong central authority" (Short, 2010, p. 22). There was "no king and no executive power" (*The Sagas of the Icelanders*). Laws were established and revised at regular gatherings to which any free man could go. Likewise, I aspire to be a teacher who is not a king, a boss, an overlord, or a taskmaster. I hold as a goal for my teaching that it be collaborative and co-constructed with students. However, just as the saga-age ideal of accessible government excluded women, slaves, and anyone without the means to get to the annual gathering, I acknowledge that my democratic ideal for my classroom does not succeed at all times at including every voice.

In the saga age, just about everybody was a farmer. I have borrowed this role, then, and rendered all of my students as farmers. In my retelling, school is their main job and sustenance. Beyond farming, though, the people of the sagas were productive, self-sufficient, creative, and playful. They built most of the things they needed (homes, ships, tools, boats, tents, skis, skates) and wanted (jewelry, tapestries). My students are also creative, productive, and quite self-sufficient. They have brilliant and intense lives outside of farming—er, schooling: They are Eagle scouts who literally build tents. They are skilled equestrians. They are artists. The people in the sagas were highly literate, and they celebrated language and anyone skilled in language (i.e., poets). My students also are highly literate and express admiration for those they believe are "good with words," "good at English," or "good writers." Ours is a community where it is not uncool to read. The reader will see that I have borrowed some of these "jobs" to give each of the students

in my sagas a creative, productive role beyond farming (=school). This is my way of honoring each of them as someone with a life, and a skillset, outside of what I ask of them as their teacher.

On a more lighthearted note: Perhaps surprisingly to some readers, the people of the saga played sports! And they loved board games. My students also love sports and games, and my classroom has over time become the location for a regular Friday lunchtime gathering called "Unofficial Fun Club," or UFC, where an eclectic group of students and teachers (anyone who wants to—no restrictions!) play board games. The reader will see that I have borrowed some elements of the leisure lives of the saga people to evoke the real, full lives of my student participants.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

In this section, I will describe the innovation itself, clearly defining the form that the three strands took during the data-collection period. I will also detail instruments and data collection and analysis methods. Before doing so, however, I will encourage the reader to recall from Chapter 1 that the innovation implemented among this group of 10^{th}-graders was intended to help these students, many of whom eschew the title "writer" for themselves irrespective of their self-reported enjoyment of writing or their success as writers as evidenced in grades, develop agentic writer identity. For the purposes of this innovation and discussion, "agency" was defined as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2011, p. 112); therefore, students' agentic writer identity will be thought to be present or developing if and when students demonstrate agentic writing behaviors, espouse agentic writing beliefs, and express self-identification as writers. The innovation was designed to nurture all of those aspects.

The innovation featured three strands of intervention—a choice-rich writing curriculum and learning environment, frequent opportunities for written structured self-reflection, and instruction in mindset. As discussed in Chapter 2, these three stranded interventions and the method to be described herein were justified by the theoretical bases on which the innovation was built, self-determination theory (reference, year), possible selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986), provisional selves theory (Ibarra, 1999) and mindset theory (Gollwitzer, 1990; Dweck, 1999, 2006, 2012), as well as the work of Gee (2003).

The method section will proceed according to the following organization. First, I will discuss the innovation and research design, not from a theoretical standpoint as provided in Chapter 2, but rather from logistic and practical standpoints. In this section, the reader will find clear operationalization of the strands of the innovation: what kinds of choices students were offered, and how often; the structure and frequency of self-reflective journal assignments; and the activities designed for instruction in mindset.

Next, I will describe and justify the process for sampling before I move on to my third method subsection, where I will describe the instruments used, including the questionnaire, interview protocol, and journal prompts, as well as the procedures for data collection.

Finally, I will detail my process for data analysis, including specific discussion of the approach to coding and restorying of the qualitative data. This section will foreground the reader's understanding of the restoried data, which appears in Chapter 5 after a statistical discussion of the initial SAWBIB results.

The Three-Strand Innovation

Choice. As discussed in Chapter 1, students at the school did not have very many opportunities to make choices on their own behalf in terms of their academic programming or, within a course, the content they study or the ways they present the products of their learning. Working from the theoretical framework detailed in Chapter 2, then, I designed a high degree of choice into the existing curriculum for the course. Here, I will explain how I operationalized choice for my students much in the same way that Guthrie and Klauda (2014) did.

One of the most regular, and most evident, manifestations of choice for my students came in the form of daily journal-writing. Every class period began with an eight-minute interval of silent writing. Though I provided a prompt every day, students were told that they always had the option of modifying or ignoring the prompt altogether. Students also had the choice, in journals, to write in whatever language felt appropriate to them. There was no penalty for profanity, mistakes, or even writing in a non-English language. Following journal-writing, every student had the choice to share with the group, though on occasion we were limited by time constraints and only a handful of students had time to share.

Additionally, several elements of choice were presented to students in the semester's featured writing assignment, the writing of reviews (of art, music, restaurants, etc.). Students were required to write two, 500-word reviews: one of the book assigned to them for summer reading (*The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*) and one on a topic of their choice. After completing both reviews in fulfillment of the assignment, students were made aware of the *New York Times* Student Review Contest (the guidelines of which were used to design the classroom assignment) and offered the choice to enter.

A third element of choice, also tied to the review assignment and worth 50 points, came in the form of a student choice about grading. Students were offered the choice to have both reviews graded, each out of 25 points, or to have only one (the free topic or the prescribed book topic) graded out of 50 points. Also during the review unit, students were asked to complete one cycle of peer-review, but then they were given the option to do more (and they were provided with class time in which to complete additional peer review).

Finally, students were offered a choice for one component of their three-part final, culminating assessment of the fall semester (self-reflection made up a second component, which will be discussed in a subsequent section). For this third, "Wild Card," portion of their final, students were required to demonstrate understanding of the term "marginality," which provides a thematic backbone to the course material, as explained in Chapter 1. Furthermore, they were required to demonstrate careful reading of and active engagement in an assigned text, *Best Intentions: The Education and Killing of Edmund Perry*. They then had a choice of how they wanted to articulate and present their understanding of the term and its relation to the text. In fulfillment of this assignment, students chose to create poems, sculptures, paintings, stories, analytic essays, movies, and even a social-science research project with the "findings" presented in a narrative video. Furthermore, students had the choice to work alone or with a partner for the final assessment.

Self-Reflection. Self-reflection was built into the course in the following ways. Most generally, the daily journals, discussed previously in the context of choice, provided frequent, semi-structured opportunities for self-reflection. On occasion, the prompt I provided was overtly encouraging of self-reflection and specifically related to their writing (e.g., "How do you feel about your review assignment, now that you're done?"). On other days, I prompted students with generally self-reflective questions (e.g., "What are you afraid of?" "Where were you five years ago today?" "If you could skip ahead to a certain age, or go back to an age, what would you pick and why?"). And on many occasions, students simply self-reflected, unprompted, and shared their reflections. Journal-sharing time often meant students "spilling," "venting," or "ranting" (their words,

not mine) about school work, grades, growing up, successes and failures in the classroom or on the playing field, family tensions and their own roles in them. On the whole, these reflections were insightful, vivid, and productive, with students commenting that the writing (and the sharing) changed their opinion, or the level of intensity of their feeling. The reader will note that because of the special, sensitive, and deeply proprietary nature of these in-class journals for my students, I did not treat them as field texts or include them in data analysis. However, a final self-reflection on the journal was included as a field text, as will be discussed.

In a more structured opportunity for self-reflection, students were asked to compose a handful of electronic assignments throughout the semester in their "reflective journals." The first of these reflective journals was completed by students during the first week of class. They received my list of "Class Values" and were asked to select one with which they agreed and one with which they disagreed and to explain their position for each. This reflective journal assignment, though completed by all students as part of the regular course program, was included as a field text for the six students selected to be part of the primary sample group. Other reflective journal prompts throughout the data-collection period included prompts to consider (and explain) their thoughts on review-writing advice from professionals, the mindset inventory and in-class activity (a part of the third strand of the innovation, to be explained in the next section), and their own process as they made their choices and completed their final assessment.

A final formalized opportunity for self-reflection came as a second component of their three-part "final," where students were asked to read through their in-class journal and discuss their journaling past (i.e., how has their journaling changed over the course of

the semester?), their journaling present (i.e., what is their current affective stance toward journaling or their journal?), and their journaling future (i.e., what are their expectations or aspirations for their journals in the coming semester?). This journal was included as a field text for the six members of the primary sample group as well as the four secondary members.

Mindset. Though I am careful to model growth mindset in the ways I speak to and in front of students, mindset was also presented to students during the data-collection interval in unit that fell between their review-writing assignment and their final assessment. This instruction took the form of an introductory in-class lecture and discussion on the concept of mindset using a 30-minute PowerPoint prepared by PERTS (Project for Education Research That Scales) Center at Stanford University. After working through the PowerPoint together, I provided students with the PowerPoint electronically so they could review it if they so chose. Also included with the electronic transmission of the PowerPoint (via our class Learning Management System, Canvas), I provided students with two links to more information about mindset for self-directed learning (I was of course also interested to see who chose to read more).

Next students completed two tasks, though they had a choice about which order to do them in. One of the tasks was for them to take a 16-item mindset inventory through Google forms, an inventory that I created working from Carol Dweck's mindset website. Note that this mindset inventory was not an official data-collection instrument, as I was less interested in their "score" in growth mindset than what sense they made of their own "score" in growth mindset, and how they connect that score, changed or not over the term of the intervention, to their experiences, beliefs, behaviors, and identities as writers. For

that reason, no reliability scaling analysis was provided for the mindset inventory, nor will it be discussed in instrumentation. The second task asked students to complete a reflective journal assignment reacting to the mindset lesson. It is important to note that students did not automatically receive their mindset inventory results upon completion of the survey. I tallied those and presented them to students after they completed their reflective journals, prompting a second day of class discussion devoted to mindset, this time included the information, new to students, about their own mindset "scores." Students had the choice of completing the reflection before or after taking the inventory, but in either case they did not receive their results until the next class session.

It should be evident from the foregoing description of the three-strand innovation that the strands were "braided" not solely in theory—they were braided in practical implementation, as well. For example, students had many choices in how they went about self-reflection, they had choices in how they pursued mindset information, and they engaged in self-reflection about their choices (and about mindset). It is almost impossible to detect where "choice" ended and "mindset" or "reflection" began. This was by design and, I argue, supported by the braided nature of the theories (see Chapter 2).

Data Collection

The qualitative data-collection process for this study included, in this order, (a) administration of the Survey of Agentic Writing Beliefs, Identity, and Behaviors (SAWBIB) instrument to identify features of the cohort overall and to identify a purposively selected sample group for interviews; (b) a semi-structured interview with the purposively selected sample group; (c) collection of multiple, ongoing entries made by the sample group into their Reflective Journals; and (d) collection of a smaller set of

journal data from a secondary sample chosen using a snowballing method. In this section, the instruments used in the study, the SAWBIB and a semi-structured interview protocol, will be discussed in more detail.

Reflective journal prompts, while serving as a data-collection source from the sample group, were extended to the entire population as part of the assigned coursework. For that reason, and because they were already described, they will not be discussed here as a data-collection instrument.

Survey of Agentic Beliefs, Identity, and Behaviors (SAWBIB). The SAWBIB was an original instrument, made up of 19 randomized items clustered around three constructs: agentic writing behaviors (how frequently and how recently have students engaged in high-risk, high-exposure, self-directed writing activities and opportunities such as publication and critique?); writer identity (do students think of themselves as writers?); and agentic writing beliefs (how intensely do students agree with or espouse statements of agentic writing belief, such as the idea that writing changes thinking, or that one can write to understand or learn?). The complete set of SAWBIB items is provided in Appendix A. The instrument was designed to maximize internal consistency around these three constructs and the reliabilities were examined using Cronbach's alpha (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The survey was administered using Google Forms to all students enrolled in the course. Students completed it as a homework assignment; it is estimated expected that it took them approximately 15-20 minutes to complete the survey.

Because of the research questions with which I was concerned, the study was predominantly qualitative in nature. I was seeking not to *measure* agentic writer identity but to explore it and to interpret and describe my students' ongoing negotiation of it.

Nevertheless, I employed a questionnaire in order to guide my purposive sampling for the small-group and interview parts of the investigation. The SAWBIB was designed to help me identify students with interesting and potentially revealing or representative mismatches of belief, behavior, and identity for further exploration. For that reason, it was built around three constructs: agentic writing behaviors, agentic writing identity, and agentic writing beliefs.

In an earlier pilot instrument, I created items around the constructs and tested it with a small group (n=31), from which I chose two students with whom to do pilot interviews. My Cronbach's alpha for that earlier instrument was 0.620, indicating that there was room to improve the clarity and effectiveness of my items. To do so, I returned to the literature and my theoretical constructs, clearly operationalizing my definitions of agentic writing behaviors and beliefs as well as relying more heavily on concepts from identity theory, such as centrality and regard (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton & Smith, 1997), to create the identity items. The result was intended to be an instrument that fairly well described how and to what extent students identify themselves as writers with a socioculturally mediated capacity to act as writers (Ahearn, 2011).

I distributed the revised instrument the to 65 students in my English class (i.e., all the enrolled sophomores). They were instructed that the questionnaire was part of our regular classroom activities, and therefore all who completed it received five points (completion credit). The response rate was 100% (n=65). However, of these 65 students, 39 had returned release forms signed by themselves and their parent, allowing them to be included as participants in the action research, per Institutional Review Board guidelines (see Appendix B for IRB approval). Therefore, I used an n of 39 to analyzed the

reliability of the instrument using the Cronbach's alpha analysis function in SPSS version 24; the results for the instrument overall as well as each of the three constructs are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha Score for SAWBIB Instrument Overall and for Each of Three Component Constructs

	Cronbach's Alpha
SAWBIB Instrument Overall	0.884
Construct #1: Agentic Writing Behavior (Items 1-6)	0.590
Construct #2: Agentic Writing Identity (Items 7-12)	0.828
Construct #3 Agentic Writing Beliefs (Items 13-19)	0.859

It is clear from the statistical data presented in Table 1 that overall, the SAWBIB instrument is a "very reliable" ("Using and Interpreting Cronbach's Alpha," 2017) measure of student agentic writing identity as operationalized along the three constructs behavior, identity, and belief. Reliability here refers specifically to the internal consistency of the instrument, i.e., that it measures what it purports to measure. In the case of the SAWBIB, the reliability score is not so high as to suggest a problematic degree of redundancy in the survey items ("Using and Interpreting Cronbach's Alpha," 2017). Of the three constructs that compose the instrument, the first (agentic writing behavior) was the weakest, with a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.590. This score was slightly below the cutoff of acceptability, falling as it did between 0.65 and 0.8 ("Using and Interpreting Cronbach's Alpha," 2017). It is clear from Table 1 that the other two

constructs, as well as the composite instrument, can be considered moderately to highly reliable. In a later section of this discussion, I will address the limitations of the SAWBIB as well as opportunities for revision and refinement of the instrument.

Sampling method. Recall that the setting for the study was a 10th-grade English classroom at a secular independent school in the American Southwest during the school year 2016-2017. The enrollment for the sophomore class for the year in question was 65 students, split essentially equally between males and females. Most students were 15 years old upon entry in the class. After the initial SAWBIB survey (disseminated via Google forms), I cleaned and imported the data associated with only those 39 students whose parents had signed release forms into SPSS version 24. More discussion of statistical analysis of the survey results appears in Chapter 4. However, in an effort to explain the methodology clearly, it is necessary to explain here that I used SPSS to construct three new variables for each of the 39 participating students who completed the survey: a "score" reflecting the mean of their responses to the items clustered around each of the three underlying constructs (behavior, identity, belief). Doing so allowed me to construct a profile for each student made up of their three construct mean scores.

I then calculated the distribution of scores for the 39-member population, generating the mean and standard deviation for each construct. Next, I calculated each of the 39 students' construct scores *vis a vis* the population mean, producing for each of 39 students a numerical reflection of their construct score in relation to the mean construct score. I used this information to determine how far (in standard deviations) each student's construct score was from the mean score. I employed a cutoff point of 0.66 standard deviations to sort the population (n=39) into a normal distribution. To clarify, any score

0.66 standard deviations above or below the construct mean would be considered a "medium" construct score, while scores more than 0.66 standard deviations below the construct mean would be considered "low" and scores more than 0.66 standard deviations above the construct mean score would be considered high. The cutoff point was chosen to organize the population into essentially equal-sized groups. This method permitted me to identify profiles by letter (e.g., HHH, LLL, MMM, etc.). As I explained in a previous section, I was interested in a representative sample of the group, so I selected poles (HHH and LLL profiles) as well as interesting mismatches (HML, LML, etc.). The construct mean scores for the entire complement of 39 participants are presented in Appendix C.

Using this approach to sampling, I selected six students to interview. These six made up the "primary" sample group. Race; socioeconomic status; (dis)ability status; sexual orientation; bilingual ability, language spoken at home, or first language learned; grade ranking or achievement; and schooling history were not taken into consideration for sampling—though these dimensions and the intersections of them might well be viable avenues for further research into students' agentic writer identity, as will be explored in the Interpretation section. However, I did endeavor to select a balanced mix of male and female students. When presented with two students with similar letter profiles, I used gender as a decider only to preserve the balance. For these six primary students, I collected field texts in the form of Reflective Journal #1 ("Class Values"), an interview, and the final reflective journal. The writer identity profiles for the primary and secondary sample group are provided in Appendix D.

I will return for a moment to Ahearn's (2011) definition of agency as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act," and invoke the social nature of learning as

discussed by Vygotsky as well as its prominence in self-determination theory, to explain how and why I selected a second, smaller sample group, which I refer to as the "secondary" sample group. In initial reading of the field texts from the primary group, I saw individual students (also on the list of 39 who had releases and for whom I had calculated profiles) invoked, acknowledged, and celebrated by name. I decided to use these name-checked students to examine and depict the social, interrelated nature of the population of student writers; they appear as recurring characters across the saga to knit the individual experiences together.

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol. The chosen type of research interview was a interview, which is, according to Morse & Niehaus (2009), the most common qualitative strategy used in mixed-methods design" (p. 127). More specifically, the interview style used here was that described by Brinkman & Kvale (2014) as the "semi-structured life world interview," in which the researcher frames the discussion around a predetermined set of queries and follows up with each participant as the interview progresses. The aim is to "obtain descriptions of the lifeworld of the [participant] in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena"—in this case, phenomena associated with writing. Though the questions were predetermined, follow-up questions were generated spontaneously by the researcher in response to the participant's offerings. The consequence of this is that some interviews included follow-up on topics or ideas not present in all of the interviews; that is, the interviews were not perfectly uniform. However, the non-uniformity of the interviews should not be interpreted as a weakness in data collection. Per Mishler (1991), it is wholly appropriate for interviewers to reframe and reformulate questions as the interviewer and interviewee work together to co-

construct the dialogue and as meanings emerge from the interaction. In fact, consistent with the research questions, the overarching narrative approach to the inquiry, and my own epistemological worldview and values, no attempt was made to "strip [the] interviews of their interactional constituents" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 68). I attempted to take on the role of "active interviewer" described by Gubrium and Holstein (2003, p. 68) by paying attention to the socially constructed dimension of the interaction—by recognizing, acting on, and responding to the participants' contributions in real time.

Interviews of the selected group of students were performed midway through the data-collection period, approximately eight weeks after the beginning of the semester, after students had had some opportunity to avail themselves of the choice-rich curriculum and to experience and reflect on the mindset lessons provided during the term, but early enough in the semester that the student was still able to access and articulate earlier experiences and previously held beliefs and attitudes toward writing. Six interviews were conducted, with the students described as "primary" subjects in the preceding sampling discussion. The interviews lasted between 13 and 19 minutes and took place on school grounds after school, before school, and during lunch, depending on the student's availability. See Appendix E for the interview protocol, which was built around the constructs of writer identity, agentic writing beliefs, agentic writing behaviors, and the cognitive consequences of writing. Questions were open-ended to solicit from participants examples of writing experiences, process, and feelings or beliefs. Interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed. Follow-up questions varied by participant, at times venturing into more detail about past school experiences or home life.

Data Analysis

As discussed in Chapter 2, the chosen methodology for the study was narrative inquiry—specifically a version of what Leavy (2015) called fictional ethnography or what Creswell (2013) called biographical study. As discussed in Chapter 2, my "storying" of participants' data was too much about them to be called autoethnography; however, I remained too present in it for it to be pure biography. I contend that my study was somewhere between biography and autoethnography; I further contend that all fiction occupies this space--after all, a writer can only populate her fiction with people, places, and things she has experienced, heard of or imagined; she cannot access someone else's consciousness and therefore her fiction, even when non-autobiographical, is drawn wholly from her own experience of the world.

To return to Murray (1991), who was discussed much earlier in the context of a review of the literature of writing pedagogy, "all writing is autobiographical" (p. 66). Murray (1991) further posited that "all reading is autobiographical" (p. 74), and it is from that viewpoint that I drew my license to interpret my students' stories as writers—and my own—via the creation of fictions using the "holistic-content" model (Lieblich et al., 1998) of restorying that is suitable for these purposes. Please refer to Chapter 2 for an exhaustive discussion of the theoretical framework and its suitability to the chosen methodology for data analysis. In this section, I will detail my procedures for analysis and presentation of the data.

I have tried to emphasize throughout this discussion that my study—and the research questions that inform it—is concerned simultaneously with the individual—does this student consider herself a writer? Why or why not? Does she espouse agentic writing

beliefs or engage in agentic writing behaviors? Why or why not?—and the collective—what do my students believe about how writers think and behave? What do my students believe about how the role of their particular school context in shaping writerly beliefs and behaviors? How do my students compose their identities as writers not only in isolation but in relation to one another, and to me? That dual consideration, for the individual and the collective, informs my choice of data analysis procedures, which are described here.

Coding. Once all interviews were complete, the set of six interviews was transcribed. I did not read through any transcripts until all interviews had been transcribed. I placed the transcriptions in a binder, choosing as the order the order in which they were returned from the transcription service. I then placed each selected participant's journal field texts behind the transcription. After I had read through the primary participants' field texts once, I made note of any other student named in those field texts, cross-referenced those students' names against my list of 39 willing participants with signed release forms. This process resulted in the four additional, "secondary" sample participants. I created a second section for the field texts of the secondary participants.

First-cycle coding. I began by reading through the binder without marking anything. I read the data set twice without commenting. On my third read, I engaged in what Saldana (2013) called " preliminary jottings" (p. 20). These preliminary jottings were made in the margins of the field texts themselves in hard copy. I created a kind of manual (low-tech) word cloud by going through my marginalia and annotations and amassing a list of words in my own notebook. These words were in some cases words

that showed up verbatim from students (e.g., “freedom,” “perfection”) and in some cases my own labels for phenomena or trends that I observed (e.g., “productivity,” “self-talk”). I kept this list by my side as I moved into an electronic step in coding. This step was really my first venture into the initial coding cycle, and it can best be described as “initial,” or “open coding”: in this approach, the researcher “reflect[s] deeply on the contents and nuances of [the] data and [begins] taking ownership of them” (Saldana, 2013, p. 100). Initial, or open, allowed me to begin to identify emergent themes while retaining the students’ own words where they explained it best and permitting myself to “take (co-)ownership” of the data, as well. Coding methods should always be aligned with research questions; an open coding approach best suited the investigative, exploratory, and collaborative nature of my investigation.

Second-Cycle Coding. Next, retaining the open-coding approach, I moved my coding work to the digital realm, working in HyperRESEARCH version 3.7.3. Within the software program, I collapsed my word cloud by grouping like terms and settled on a set of 26 codes. Many of these codes fell almost entirely under the umbrella of “affective” codes (Saldana, 2013, p. 59). Per Saldana (2013), affective coding comprises coding for emotions and values as well as “versus coding” (binaries). However, from my initial open coding, I also saw that my participants were sharing a lot that did not fall neatly into either of these categories. They talked and wrote a lot about their pasts, their presents, and their futures. Knowing that I planned to tell their stories in a narrative form (see chapter 2), I retained a set of narrative codes, which, per Saldana (2013) fell under “literary and language” codes.

Using an axial-coding approach, I grouped 26 codes that resulted from my initial word cloud of approximately 60 words into categories, per the guidance provided by Creswell (2013), Lichtman (2010), and MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, and Milstein (2009) as cited in Saldana (2013). The resultant six categories, each with four or five codes, were a mix of affective and literary/language categories, as shown in Table 2. My goal in this second-cycle coding step was, per Saldana (2013), to "strategically reassemble data that were 'split' or 'fractured' during the Initial Coding process" (p. 218). This step necessarily involves subjectivity and interpretation on the part of the researcher, as she must determine what is redundant or most illustrative.

Table 2

First-Cycle Open Coding: Codes and Categories

Category	Codes				
Cognition	How I Think	Ideas	Learning	Mindset	
Emotion	Anxiety	Confidence	Pleasure	Uncertainty	Release
Internal	"For Me"	Self-Discovery	Self-Talk	Self-Evaluation	
External	Constraints	For School	How Others Write	Sharing	
Writing	Genres	How I Write	Mechanics	Revision	
Story	Change/Growth	Characters	Past	Present	Future

Throughout the first cycle of coding, I deliberately avoided collapsing the data into the codes that underpinned the SAWBIB (behavior, identity, belief), as it would have been foolish (at best) to design data-collection methods around three constructs (behavior, identity, and belief) and then turn around and gasp, "Eureka! My students are preoccupied with behavior, identity, and belief!" However, as I reached the end of my

first cycle of coding and I moved into a second cycle of axial coding, I became satisfied that I had reached "saturation" (Saldana, 2013, p. 222) in the data and that I had allowed my students' own preoccupations to be "heard." At that point, I did find that I was able to nest my six categories with their respective 4-5 codes into the three underlying constructs. That nesting is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Axial Coding: Categories Nested into Initial SAWBIB Constructs

Construct: Behavior	Construct: Identity	Construct: Belief
Writing	Story	Cognition
External	Internal	Emotion

At this stage in the coding process, I undertook discussions with colleagues to validate my findings, extend my thinking, and check my interpretations. Though member-checking (that is, sharing the coding with the participants themselves and soliciting their input) is often a step undertaken by qualitative researchers to improve the validity of their findings (Saldana, 2013), I decided not to undertake that step. Given my positionality to the research context and the participants themselves (I am their teacher, the giver of grades), I was concerned that revealing to them my perception of their identities as agentic writers could be inescapably evaluative from their perspective, even though my analysis is not intended to be. The reader should consider whether, at 15 years old, learning that your teacher observes in you a substantial amount of fear, low self-confidence, or a disregard for grades would affect him or her, positively or negatively. At this point, I constructed a codebook including the underlying constructs, the categories, the 26 codes, and several examples of each code from the field texts.

Pattern-seeking. Once I was satisfied with my codes and categories and the way these nested into my SAWBIB themes, I undertook a process to try to tease out striking phenomena and trends for the sample group overall. In this step, I was concerned with the social fabric that underpinned my sample participants' individual stories. To attempt to identify some of the dimensions of their experience as a collective, "socioculturally mediated" (Ahearn, 2011) experience, relied on the "frequency report" function in HyperRESEARCH to glean prominent codes for each of my sample participants. I want to be explicit in pointing out that I was looking for general shapes and trends, not counting utterances. I created a matrix of my 10 participants (primary and secondary) arranged by profile—HHH on the left to LLL on the right—and populated its grid with the top 10 codes, frequency-wise, for each participant. Then, using a ruler and red pen, I traced lines connecting each code, looking for interesting shapes that emerged.

This was not a conclusive process; I did not have any particularly profound "aha!" moments here. That was not a concern, however, as I understood that I did not need conclusions to go into my restorying process. In fact, the restorying process is itself an analytic move, not a novel way to present conclusive results. I trusted that more would emerge from my consideration of the characters who inhabited this writing "landscape." At this point in the process, then, I set the initial glimpse into the social fabric aside. I wanted to "plant" some tentative ideas about the writing community in the back of my mind and let them germinate while I shifted my focus to the individuals whose stories I would tell in my sagas.

Restorying. Ready to begin the restorying process, I returned at this point to the "three-dimensional space" model proposed by Clandinin and Connelley (2000) and

operationalized by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002). Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) depict a chart, or graphic organizer, that permits the narrative researcher to begin constructing the story, homing in on what is essential for that character by isolating "Personal," "Social," "Past," "Present," "Future," and "Situation/Place" elements. Though I discovered this model only after I had completed my first- and second-cycle coding, I was delighted to find that my code categories, especially "Story" (past/present/future) and "Internal" (personal) and "External" (social) superimposed beautifully on the Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) model. I worked from my coded field texts in HyperRESEARCH to populate this chart for each of my six primary characters. These tables are less presentation of results than process artifact. The reader can see that each grid on the matrix is populated with a mix of verbatim extractions from the field text as well as my own interpretation.

The story grids are working, process documents. In them the reader can see my working through the data, including my initial decisions about how I would narrate the participant's saga. Some decisions I abandoned or modified—for example, I ultimately made Broder a craftsman, not a stone-stacker. This had to do with my deeper investigation into the historical era of the sagas as well as my increasing comfort with taking liberties in fictionalizing my students. It was during this process that I came closest to having "aha" moments. For each character, I attempted to isolate a central tension, which I explored further through the process of restorying. The reader is invited to consider the story grid alongside the restoried saga and to discover for him or herself the ways in which I attempted to use the formal aspects of fiction to evoke and explore

the student's self-described experience. A story grid for the character "Broder" (HHM), is shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Broder's Story Grid

BRODER (HHM)					
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	Situation/Place
Always a lot going on in my head; borrowing song lyrics, considering a color; not really troubled by uncertainty. Perfectionism in writing but not bball?	Loves teams and camaraderie (joined JV). Finally something I would be proud to show to someone else; not really concerned with (externally imposed) constraint. No talk of how others write. Mostly sharing talk = benefit to him, not from listening to others; screenwriter uncle; submit to contest	Story wrote itself—story took off. It was one of the proudest moments of my career. "Original original." Completely original. It caught on. Just does the things required	Waiting for something to "catch on" This year decided to stop trying to be perfect; overcoming perfectionism and writing for himself—figuring out where inspiration ends and genuine begins—finding joy in joining and not being perfect. My art and I have a complex relationship	Hopes to be a screenwriter someday. Can an assigned writing "catch on" that way? Benefit in listening to others share	Ornfjord==-water, collecting shells or stones (ideas)? stone graveyard lots of sorting—genres (making statues?) Grades=money?

With my use of the word "tension" here, I do not mean to be negatively connotative; I mean tension here like tension on a string pulled at two ends, not emotionally upsetting tension. For Broder, for example, I identified a tension between perfectionism and originality. Broder expressed a great concern for perfectionism in his writing, though he felt no such impulse in his other pursuits (basketball, debate team). Yet he also really wanted to be "original" in his writing, and almost chastised himself when he thought he was being derivative of others' work. As I hope is evident in Broder's section of the saga, I put these two ideas, perfectionism and originality, in tension with one another, attempting to learn about how they interacted in Broder's life—and, perhaps, in the lives of other of my students. Though I am providing these background or process documents only for Broder, it is my hope that the reader can use this material to teach him or herself how to read the sagas I provide in Chapter 4 and can discover independently what the central tensions for each character are.

Finally, I composed a fictional saga with sections devoted to each participant in the primary sample group, aiming to capture in my "storying" of their data their individual development of their writer identity and their negotiations of agentic writing beliefs and behaviors. The result, a single narrative that wends through the lives of each of the six primary participants, is intended to stand on its own as a fictional representation of six characters' "journeys;" however, their interconnectedness is meant to evoke a shared setting (akin to our shared class community). Further, collective themes and concepts, those that extend across the sample set, were be presented through the use of recurring characters and landscape elements.

To begin with, I created a community—a particular fjord—where the stories would take place. I called this place Ornfjord, or Eagle's Fjord, to evoke the real school mascot. Though this is the name of a real place in Iceland, I decided that my stories all took place in northern Norway (see previous discussion of Norse Saga as a genre), a place I had visited and could imagine and evoke. Furthermore, my stories take place in the summer, when there is near-constant daylight in northern Norway. This choice was meant to parallel, or play with, the sun-saturated nature of the real setting, in the American Southwest.

Using a multiple Scandinavian name reference books (Coleman & Veka, 2010; Ellefson, 2011), I also chose for all characters Scandinavian names that I thought captured something essential about them while also obscuring their identities, as well as a creative/productive pursuit or vocation. The only character to have writer as her in-saga pursuit is Dagny, the only HHH profile included in the set. Others have vocations or pursuits—shipbuilding, sculpting, law-reader—that are meant to be metaphoric representations of their writing and their ongoing negotiation of writer identity.

Though I opened with journal excerpts from a character I called Runa, her character appears as the name, and alter-ego, she gave herself: Squonk. Squonk is, in my saga, exactly the kind of mythical creature that shows up in the Norse sagas of the Icelanders. The name is not very Norse, but in this case I thought it more important to preserve Runa's creation than to superimpose my own. And besides—the Norse people traveled all over the world, picking up objects, words, and influences. Why not weave a Pennsylvanian myth into my saga? Character names in fiction are often symbolic, representative, poetic, or otherwise significant, as can be their occupations. I made these

restorying decisions by considering the story grids and central tensions I discovered throughout the data-collection and –analysis processes. The characters' names and occupations are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Saga Character Names, Name Meanings, and Occupations

Character Name (*primary **secondary)	Meaning†	Occupation
ANNAR Teacher-to-himself *	Descendent; warrior	Carpenter
BODIL**	Compound of "help" and "battle"	Farmer
BRODER Always-Creating*	Brother	Carver
DAGNY the Investigator*	New day	Poet
EINVALD the Practical*	Alone, exceptional; ruler	Shipbuilder
KYRRE**	Quiet, peaceful	Farmer
LAGE**	Friend	Farmer
RAGNA who Looks Inside*	Advice-giver	Law-Reader
SOLVOR the Uncertain*	House, large room; careful, protected	Weaver
SQUONK** aka RUNA	Rune, secret lore	Mythical Creature
STRESS		Troll

†All name meanings derived from Coleman & Veka (2010)

Unprompted, almost every student discussed stress and some experience with stress, a trend that I did not find surprising given my familiarity with the community (see Chapter 1). For that reason, I rendered stress as a troll—annoying, and both real and unreal. More than one student invoked a particular (powerful, somewhat legendary) writing teacher from their past (the same teacher from every participant!), so she was

rendered as a quasi-magical being. Many participants talked about the role that sharing (their in-class journals in particular) played for them; for that reason I rendered the journal-sharing space as the kind of trading market that does show up in Norse sagas.

During the process of restorying, I attempted to isolate, crystallize, and present what I viewed as a (the?) central tension of this student's negotiation of agentic writer identity—to freeze, unfreeze, and freeze the story of them. It is my hope that the preceding discussion of my methods and approach to the restorying process will illuminate the stories themselves. In the next section, the stories—the saga—will be presented after a brief discussion of the SAWBIB results.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The research study has heretofore been described as a narrative inquiry, and as the preceding chapters make clear, the epistemology and theoretical frameworks that underpinned this research study—as well as the guiding research questions—were not positivist in nature. A reader may be surprised, then, to find that the first portion of results were somewhat quantitative in nature. It was important to point out that the SAWBIB instrument was designed and employed primarily as a tool that was used to make determinations about how to sample students for the interviews. However, the data from the SAWBIB allowed the researcher to make some broad early inferences about the ways that the three constructs underpinning agentic writer identity interact with one another. The point of this study was still not to "measure" agentic writer identity, or to essentialize individual and complex student writers to a score or a set of scores. Nevertheless, a somewhat quantitative analysis of the scores provided by the larger population allowed me to start sketching the context—the landscape, the village—to which these complex student writers belonged.

The presentation of results in this section corresponded to the method employed for data collection and analysis—that is, initial results from the SAWBIB were presented first, including some descriptive statistical analysis of those results. Next, the stories composed from the qualitative data were presented. It was anticipated that some of the phenomena suggested by the SAWBIB data would be illuminated by the presentation of the stories; the chapter devoted to interpretation will further elaborate on the relation between the types of data.

As stated in the method section, the SAWBIB was administered to 65 sophomore students enrolled in a tenth-grade English course. Of those, release forms were received from 39 students and their parents or guardians. The descriptive statistics presented here relate to the population of 39 students. Of those students, 19 self-identified as male and 20 self-identified as female. Of the 39 participants, 29 were 15 years old, 9 were 16, and 1 was 14 years old.

Working within SPSS version 24, a new variable was constructed for each student to reflect a score for each of the three constructs. This score was the mean of all items associated with the construct (i.e., six items for behavior, six items for identity, and seven items for belief). Then, the mean, median, and standard deviation for each of the three underlying constructs for all 39 participants were calculated and have been presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Per-Construct Mean, Median, and Standard Deviation (n=39)

Construct	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
1. Writing Behaviors	2.86	2.67	0.51
2. Writing Identity	2.70	2.83	0.59
3. Writing Beliefs	3.08	3.00	0.47

Likert scale used for all questionnaire items: 4, Strongly agree; 3, Agree; 2, Disagree; 1, Strongly disagree. Computed variable retains scaling.

As is evident in Table 6, students are somewhat higher in their espousal of writing beliefs, mean = 3.08, than either their writing behaviors, mean = 2.86, or writing identity, mean = 2.70. Next, a correlation matrix was produced to examine whether there were

statistically significant correlations among student scores on the three constructs underlying agentic writer identity, as explored by the SAWBIB instrument. The correlation matrix has been presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Correlation Matrix for SAWBIB constructs (n = 39)

Constructs	Behavior	Identity	Belief
Behavior	–		
Identity	.55*	–	
Belief	.53*	.67*	–

*Pearson correlation value indicated by * significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

As can be seen in the correlation matrix, all of the underlying constructs are correlated with one another. Generally speaking, a Pearson correlation coefficient around .50 and .60 indicated a moderate correlation between two variables. All of the newly created construct variables correlate moderately with one another, with the strongest correlation being between writer belief and writer identity. The weakest correlation, albeit still a strong correlation, appears to be between writer belief and writer behavior.

Further statistical analysis was undertaken to examine the difference in means for the three constructs for the population of 39 participants. This comparison of means was done via a one-way repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) using SPSS version 24. The one-way repeated measures ANOVA was used instead of a paired-samples T-test to minimize the contributions of chance to the analysis and to yield useful information regarding effect size, eta squared, as will be discussed here.

A one-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relations among student-produced mean scores for each of the three constructs on the SAWBIB

instrument. A variable labeled SAWBIB was created, which included three levels: behavior, identity, and belief. Results from the ANOVA showed there is a significant difference among means, $F(2, 37) = 14.76$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .44$. Consistent with Cohen's (1988) guidelines for interpreting η^2 , the result of .44 indicates a large effect size, or strength of association. That is to say, the difference between these means is statistically significant , and the magnitude of this difference is substantial. However, this information only establishes that the means for the three construct scores are, in fact, different. Further analysis was required to better understand which constructs demonstrated differences in means. Thus, post-hoc tests were conducted to evaluate pairwise differences between the means. Results from the pairwise comparisons have been presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Pairwise comparison of SAWBIB construct means

	Identity	Belief
Behavior	AD = 0.15	AD = 0.23*
	Std. Error: .084	Std. Error: .076
	Sig.: .232	Sig.: .015
Identity		AD = 0.38*
		Std. Error: .070
		Sig.: .001

**Significant at p < 0.05; AD = absolute difference between per-construct calculated means. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni. Likert scale for all questionnaire items is: 4, Strongly agree; 3, Agree; 2, Disagree; 1, Strongly disagree.*

As can be seen in the pairwise comparisons in Table 8, two of the three pairs of construct means are significantly different: the first of these is the difference between mean score for the construct behavior, and the mean score for the construct belief, 2.86

versus 3.08. The second is the difference between the mean score for the construct identity and the construct belief, 2.70 versus 3.08. The third pairing, between the construct behavior and the construct identity was not found to be statistically significant.

For the purposes of this discussion, the difference in means between the identity constructs behavior/belief and identity/belief will be most closely evaluated, as the results of the statistical analysis produced herein provide a provocative context within which to examine the qualitative data field texts produced by the six primary participants. However, it is not apparent from this data what, if any, causal relation exists among these constructs or which construct might be construed as the "driver" of other aspects of agentic writer identity, if any. To that end, particular attention was paid during the restorying process to apparent interactions between identity and beliefs. These will be discussed after the presentation of the sagas themselves in the discussion devoted to interpretations.

Rithöfundursögur, or Writer Sagas

In the valley beside the mountain in the shape of a camel, not far from an outcropping of rocks that appeared to be monk praying, was the village of Ornfjord, or Eagle's Fjord.

In Ornfjord, in the second administrative region, or quarter, somewhat inland from the homes of the free farmers Dagny the Curious, a poet who mostly kept to herself but who was known to take on private-investigator assignments when asked, and Broder-Always-Thinking-and-Often-Talking, there lived Lage and, next door to him, the tapestry weaver Solvor the Uncertain, also free farmers. Solvor lived with her father, who was not himself a weaver but who knew how to do many things well. He often told Solvor of the

time he had spent as a younger man doing different things—carving stones and wood, and composing poetry, and weaving.

Solvor the Uncertain had moved many times with her father, and she expected that soon—probably within two years' time—they would be leaving Ornfjord.

Like her father, Solvor too was good at many things: weaving, of course, and also playing the harp. Sometimes when Solvor had completed a portion of her weaving, she would call her father over to her loom to inspect it. Her father would point to her work and say, "Here, it doesn't really work. I know what you are trying to do, but focus a little more here." Solvor would set back to work at the loom and soon her father would say, "Yes, that makes it better."

Even though Solvor the Uncertain was a skilled and capable weaver, she was still just learning. No one had ever said so, but she knew that her tapestries were not yet ready to be given as gifts or shared with the community. She was committed to learning how to weave, but she often found herself frustrated and distressed. "No, no, no, no, no," she could be heard saying as she weaved.

The swatches she worked on were mostly to help her master tension, perfect her warp and her weft. These she showed to her father or to his friends, other master weavers, when they would come over "Oho, Solvor the Uncertain," they would call. "Let us see your weaving and decide how you are coming along!"

Solvor would dutifully produce her small, skilled squares for their inspection, and they would always pronounce it quite good. In her storage trunk, she also had several small swatches that she never shared: These were not technically impressive; they were impulsive little secrets she had woven with leftover scraps. Solvor the Uncertain thought

perhaps one or two of these were beautiful or good, but she had never shown them to her father or to anyone.

But it had not been the production of small, skilled squares that had attracted Solvor the Uncertain to the loom all those years ago. Rather, she had been captivated by the elaborate pictorial tapestries that depicted thrilling scenes from Norse mythology that Solvor had seen and heard of—one supposedly 100 feet long! She longed to make such tapestries.

In fact, it had been the idea of making grand picture tapestries that had made Solvor take to the loom in the first place. And yet now she found herself making either small, proficient swatches that demonstrated mastery or smaller, sloppy swatches that seemed to reflect only her tense wrists and stiff elbows.

She found no joy in making the technical swatches to demonstrate her mastery, but she found comfort in their demands. In her sloppy swatches, she found a kind of joy, but distress: She hated making mistakes, and without any expectations, how could she know if she was doing well enough?

One day, however, Solvor the Uncertain found herself in the trading town. There, she saw people her own age offering their wares for inspection. Some had carved wooden handles or silver brooches. She watched and listened as the people handled one another's work. "What interesting details you have put here, Bodil," someone said to a girl Solvor's age who lived next to Ragna, in an area of the fjord close to where Solvor and Lage lived. Bodil's brooch looked perfect to Solvor, gleaming there in the sun. Everyone who passed by had something kind to say about it.

“How long have you been offering your work in trade?” Solvor asked Bodil as she handled the brooch. “It is perfect!”

Bodil laughed. “Oh, hardly. There are so many mistakes. And mistakes hold a very scary place in my heart. I put my brooches out here in the sun not so others can see them and judge them but so I can myself accept that they will not be perfect every time!”

When Solvor got home that day, she opened her trunk and pulled out all the secret swatches, the ones that were not good enough to show. She laid them out on the floor and she assembled them into a large tapestry, perhaps as large as the 100-foot one she had heard of. As she moved the pieces around, she saw that while each one was unimpressive, together they began to tell a story. She worked and worked at it all that evening, choosing just the right way to stitch together the swatches.

When she was done, she had finally made a grand tapestry. It looked beautiful there on the floor, caught in the last of the day’s sun streaming in from the high window. It did not tell the story of Norse myths; it did not make a picture of men or women on horseback. Rather, it showed Solvor the Uncertain, her father, their home, the loom. It was a picture of the longhouse that Solvor expected she would be leaving before too long, and she had made it out of her bits and pieces. “This is where I’ve grown up,” Solvor’s first grand tapestry said. “This is the room where it happened.”

2.

Also in Ornfjord, near the home of Dagny but nearer still to the water’s edge, lived Broder, the carver. Broder was a skilled carver, and he lent his skills to the building of ships. Though he was plenty capable when it came to the construction of the ship itself, Broder really enjoyed carving fearsome dragoins into the fronts of the ships he

built. He knew that the ships themselves—strong, seaworthy—were the main show, and he built the ships dutifully and well. But he wished that more people would pay closer attention to the distinctive faces he carved.

When he finished a ship carving he deemed good enough, he went to the door and called to his uncle, a carver of some renown. “Uncle,” he said. “Look and see.” And his uncle would sometimes pick up a tool and modify the face Broder had carved, or he would nod approvingly. And sometimes he would tease Broder by saying, “Ah, this work reminds me of my own! Are you sure I did not carve this dragon myself?” And his uncle would walk back across the shore to his own longhouse where he did his own carving. Broder’s uncle was so experienced that others did the workaday shipbuilding; he was free to focus on ornamentation.

Broder wanted his carvings—of good, fearsome dragons—to be perfect, and for that reason these visits from his uncle would shake him.

Once, and only once, Broder had made a dragon that was perfect. And he hadn’t even had to labor; in just 30 minutes the dragon birthed itself, it seemed. And it hadn’t been his uncle who judged that dragon perfect but rather the even more famous and particular artisan of Ornfjord, the legendary Asdis, one of the most admired chieftains of the first administrative quarter. Even before Asdis had pronounced the dragon perfect, Broder himself had looked at it and decided that it was truly original. “Completely original,” he told himself, proud.

But that was last year. This year, Broder knew, he had not made anything perfect. Day after day, though, he wielded his tools and tried to make something perfect and

original. Sometimes, overwhelmed by his desire to carve a perfect dragon, he put down his tool and carved nothing at all, and on those days he hoped his uncle would not appear.

When Broder was not carving dragons or building ships, he played sporting games, or *leikar*, with other boys of Ornfjord. Broder was not at all the best sportsman, he was slower than they were, but he loved being with the other boys—Kyrre and Lage among them—and he liked the way the fresh air and sun made him feel strong. He laughed often as they played hnutukast, where they tossed bones at one another. Sometimes, in a friendly way, even as a bone flew through the air, Kyrre or Lage would ask Broder, "How goes the carving?"—they knew only a little of his carving, and they knew he came from a carving family; often, before the boys started collecting water mint, Broder had to shake wood shavings from his clothes. Broder would laugh, "Carving and I have a complex relationship." And the boys would go back to throwing bones at one another in sport.

One day, just to see what would happen, Broder invited Lage and Kyrre inside his longhouse to see his work. He began by showing them the perfect dragon, the *original* original pile. They, too, thought it was a fearsome dragon. Feeling bold, Broder then showed them a less-perfect dragon, one his uncle had thought too simple. But that dragon delighted Kyrre and Lage, and their delight in turn delighted Broder himself. He looked at the not-perfect dragon and decided he would leave it as it was.

The next day, Broder's uncle knocked on his door and let himself in. "Have you taken a look at this dragon?" he asked Broder. "Have you thought about my suggestions?"

"I have," Broder said. "And I have decided to leave it as it is. It is not perfect—I agree with you—but it is my own work." Just then, Broder had an idea. In his pocket, he found a bone left over from his game with Kyrre and Lage. He balanced it on the not-quite-perfect dragon's head. "There," he said. "Now it is truly original. *Original* original."

3.

Annar arrived in Ornfjord in lamb-fold-time. In Ornfjord, as in every other place, one could only move his household during the specified four "moving" days at the end of May. Annar had arrived in Ornfjord and chosen a spot on the other side of the wood from Dagny and Broder to build his longhouse. But Annar had arrived just one day before the moving days, and so before he could set up his home and farm, he had to spend a night outdoors. This did not trouble Annar, as he had always been successful in the past, and he believed he would continue to succeed in everything.

Now, the administrative quarter in Ornfjord where Annar hoped to live, across the wood from the farms of Dagny and Broder; adjacent on the other side from the home of Lage; near, too, to where Lage lived next to Solvor the Uncertain; and quite a ways from the farm of Einvald or the area where Ragna lived beside Bodil, was the known territory of one particularly malicious little troll, who liked to agitate the farmers.

Sometimes this troll would tiptoe up to a farmer like Annar while he was building a table or a bench, and whisper in his ear, "Shouldn't you work a little faster? Couldn't you carve that a little better? Won't the others see your mistakes?" Usually the farmers could shrug the troll off, dispatch him with a sharp word or two (trolls are, after all, more annoying than magical, and when reminded of their own shortcomings, they tend to flee).

But sometimes, when he felt like it, and when the farmer couldn't find the sharp words to send the troll packing, the troll would keep at it, dancing on the roof of a longhouse, cackling even when he wasn't working—while he was eating or walking or trying to sleep!—and the troll would whip a farmer like Annar into such a state of agitation that they lost sleep, forgot to eat, and cried without prompting.

Many times throughout his life, Annar had watched as his beloved mother sent a troll packing with just a few well-chosen phrases. Annar thought that his mother was probably the worst person in the world for a troll to encounter.

But Annar himself had never had the opportunity to scare off a troll for himself. He wasn't exactly looking forward to the first time he would have to repel a troll alone, but he was eager to see if he could pull it off. And now Annar lived in Ornfjord by himself, and his mother was not there to talk the troll away, so he knew the time was coming.

In fact, as Annar set up a tent on the edge of the wood for his first night out under unfamiliar stars—how small and alone he felt sleeping like this, without the smoky, wooden aromas that filled a longhouse, and without his mother—he knew in his belly that the troll would come that night.

Sure enough, that night, when Annar was nearly asleep, the famous troll arrived and began tugging at the ends of Annar's hair, and scratching his ears with a fingernail. "Annar, Annar," the troll teased, dancing his mean little troll feet across Annar's chest and stomach. "Are you sure you are strong enough to sleep out here in the open? Are you sure you aren't too scared?"

At first, Annar panicked. Two thoughts ran through his head on endless repeat: that the troll was going to make this night difficult, and that Annar himself had not done nearly enough to prepare for his night out of the safety of the house.

He sat up and considered the troll. The troll was so small! But his feet felt like anvils on Annar's belly. Annar was afraid that if he opened his mouth to speak, no words would come, and then the troll would seize the opportunity to dive into Annar's mouth and start pulling teeth. Annar opened his mouth, and a voice came out and the voice made words. The words were Annar's mother's words, but the voice was Annar's own: "Go away, troll," Annar said. "I can do this. I built this tent. I will sleep here just fine, alone tonight, and tomorrow I will begin building a longhouse just there"—here he pointed to the field beside the wood.

The troll looked where Annar pointed and then, slumping his little troll shoulders, shuffled off. Annar knew that the troll would be back. But he also knew that if he could deal with a troll dancing on his ribcage, he could certainly handle a troll dancing on the roof of his longhouse. He would borrow his mother's words for troll disposal as long as he needed them, until he found his own words.

4.

There was a girl called Dagny the Curious, who was the daughter of two poets. When Dagny the Curious was a little girl, she daydreamed about becoming a shapeshifter. She knew ordinary people couldn't be shapeshifters, but nevertheless, when she was small, she played at shapeshifting, deciding one day to be a berserk, the next to be a farmer, the next to be a troll.

Dagny the Curious lived near Broder, close to the water in Ornfjord. She knew Broder well, but she spent most of her time with Ragna who Looks Inside, who lived across the dale near Bodil. Dagny spent a great deal of time with Ragna who Looks Inside and Bodil, and she had known them for years, but she was not certain whether she could describe them as friends. The four of them—Dagny, Broder, Ragna, and Bodil—traveled together to the annual assembly in the spring where the issues of the day were debated and settled. Any free farmer could travel to the spring assembly, as long as he or she could afford the trip.

On these long journeys, Dagny kept mainly to herself, composing poems on a small rune stone that she carried in her pocket, working with a sharp tool. Occasionally, she would read a verse aloud to her companions, a verse celebrating the magic in the everyday:

I sit down at a table and think—

How good and suitable for every moment

Fruit is

Though her companions often found her verses delightful and said so, it was not their words that Dagny added into the margins as she considered and reconsidered her poems, it was her own. She had worked out a private system of rune markings to indicate the poems she liked best and those she deemed, in her word, "dumb."

It was on one of these return trips from the spring assembly that Dagny the Curious found by the roadside a runestone that she did not recognize. She picked up the stone and considered its cryptic markings. It seemed to tell a story or convey a poem. Even more familiar, and even more striking in its familiarity, was the system of rune-

markings the notebook's author had used to evaluate the book's contents. Dagny was captivated by this runestone and she was sure that if she read it carefully she would be able to figure out who its owner was, and return it. "Dagny," Bodil called out, seeing Dagny poring over the runestone. "You have not once labeled that runestone's markings 'dumb' the way you do your own!" Bodil had an uncanny ability to notice small details like the bemused smile that played at Dagny's lips as she appreciated the runestone's mysterious contents.

The whole way back to Ornfjord from assembly, then, she pored over the runestone. She came across passages that were eerily familiar, but unknown all the same, like a verse about the sea:

It's dark.

Everything is moving,

Everything seems gone.

It all starts to blur.

Just when Dagny thought she knew who the author could be, she would rotate the stone, or re-read a stretch of notations, and she would find a piece of writing that destroyed her theory. Could the same person who wrote about the fearsome sea really write a comical poem about a woman looking for a garment for her pet squab? Dagny was mystified by the runstone, but thrilled. Even her foiled attempts to discern the book's owner were enjoyable, in their own way. Deciphering the runestone was a process of learning, and unlearning, and relearning. And she quite wanted to meet whoever had committed these fragmented verses to stone.

When the journey was over, and Dagny was back in her own cozy longhouse adjacent to Broder's, she turned on a light. The light would serve to signal Dagny's truest friend: a friendly troll named Squonk. You see, Dagny had recently learned that Runa sometimes became Squonk and she was able to see in the melancholy Squonk the same gentle happiness she saw in Runa, so she was not afraid of Squonk. (The opposite was also true—Dagny could see in Runa traces of the sadness of Squonk, which only inclined her to be gentler in her dealings with happy Runa.)

Dagny lived near Broder, yes, and she traveled with him and Ragna and Bodil to the assembly, but it was Squonk with whom she felt most comfortable. Like Dagny herself, Runa/Squonk could shapeshift in a way ordinary free farmers could not, but ferocious berserks were said to be able to. Dagny needed a friend with whom she could shape-shift, and it just so happened that the friend for this was quasi-magical girl who lived clear on the other side of Ornfjord. They had a private system worked out whereby Dagny would leave a light burning to summon Squonk to her door.

On this night, Squonk, seeing the light, arrived within moments at Dagny's door. "Dagny, friend, it's me—Squonk!"

Dagny opened the door to her little magical friend and presented her with the runestone. "Squonk, I found this, and I would like to return it to its owner. Can you help me figure out whose it is?"

Squonk looked at Dagny as if she were crazy. "Dagny, friend, you must be kidding! This is your stone! You wrote these poems!"

Suddenly, Dagny recognized the book in her hands, and she laughed. She laughed because she was no stranger to making mistakes, and she was more than fine with making

mistakes. But she also laughed because she had become the thing she wanted to be when she was small. Her shapeshifting had been so complete, she hadn't even recognized herself. As she went to sleep that night, the words of Bodil rang in her ears: "You hav

5.

And then there was Einvald the Practical. Einvald lived as far away from Dagny and Broder as one could live and still live in Ornfjord. He lived very near to the friendly shape-shifter Squonk, but he didn't even know it. He believed himself to be neighbors with happy Runa, but he was utterly ignorant of Runa's alter-ego, the sad little Squonk. Einvald cannot be faulted for this ignorance; Squonk did not show herself to Einvald or much of anyone

Einvald the Practical was, like Broder, a shipbuilder. As a shipbuilder, he was respected. The ships he built were known to be sound and sea-worthy, even if they were not quite as dazzling in their details—the sorts of carved indulgences that caused the right kind to shipbuilder to whistle while he worked, his head full of images of gods and monsters which he translated to notches and chips and grooves in a hunk of wood. He was also known to be liberal in offering commentary on the ships *others* had made. Frequently, his comments were apt, and often they were kind, but he was known to have a brusque manner.

It was the custom for many toolmakers to engrave elaborate designs into handles of weapons and tools, but Einvald the Practical often expressed a concern that the designs would interfere with the utility of the tool or weapon.

Of course, Einvald expressed this concern at home, in his own workshop, as well. As he engraved a design into a handle, he asked himself, “What are the benefits and negatives of doing this? If I do this and it goes wrong, what happens?”

On occasion, Einvald the Practical would find himself engraving a decorative design into an axe-handle and he would realize that he was quite enjoying himself. But then he would put down the newly decorated hunk of wood, see it there as a good-looking piece of wood without an axe-head attached, and say, “Well, then, Einvald, what good will this pretty axe-handle be to you in the woods? You cannot cut down a tree with a handsome block of wood. You should save this decorating for another time. Right now, get that axe-head attached!”

And that, of course, reminded Einvald that he had other work to do on the farm. He had wood-clearing to do, and he needed a finished axe. His axe-in-progress was not ready, so he went to his toolshed to locate an axe. There were several to choose from, but Einvald reached immediately for an axe he loved. It was one fashioned by someone he admired, one Hrafn Hafornson. This axe was powerfully made and time-tested.

As Einvald headed into the woods with his favorite axe, he looked down at the tool in his hands. He had used this axe a hundred times at least, but he had never quite noticed how intricately engraved its handle was. As he hefted the axe, he realized that the grooves—those he thought were purely decorative indulgences for the axe’s maker—helped the tool sit in his hands. Hrafn Hafornson, Einvald knew, was no foolish man, no waster of time. And yet he had carved this design.

Could it be that one did not have to choose between making useful tools and handsome tools? He swung.

6.

Ragna was a law-speaker. She attended the annual assembly with Broder, Bodil, and Dagny. At the assembly, it was Ragna's job to deliver readings of the laws and make them clear to everyone in attendance. Ragna was proud of her role as a law-speaker. Reading the law aloud meant more than simply reading; Ragna had to present it was rhythm and feeling so that everyone gathered on the grassy hill would understand the laws to discuss them.

In this manner, Ragna's job was to take what was in the minds of the law council and make it real for the all the people. She was good at this job. She had the voice and the presence to be heard, and she had poetic sensibilities, and she had a wise understanding of the laws she read aloud.

Inside her own head, there was a set of verses and laws and histories at least as complex and vivid as those she read aloud in her official capacity; Ragna spent a great deal of time sifting through the jumbled storehouse of her brain: fractured friendships, such as with Dagny the Curious, and long, unexplained stretches of sadness. Ragna wished she could stand on a grassy slope and make those stories as real and audible as the laws she read aloud.

Instead, she kept two lives—her out-loud life as a law-reader and her inside life as a frequently sad, sometimes angry, often isolated girl.

One trading day, Ragna found herself inspecting a pretty silver brooch. It was much too fancy to wear around the farm. But maybe she could wear it to assembly for the reading of the laws? Then again, it was an expensive item to get if she was going to wear it but once a year.

The man who had made the brooch saw her looking at it. “Where will you wear such a brooch, Ragna?” he asked.

“I do not know,” Ragna said, explaining her predicament. She could afford to trade for the brooch, but she was paralyzed with indecision about where to wear it.

The man laughed, but then he got a serious look on his face. “Wear it somewhere you will create. So that every time you look at it, you will be reminded of how this little brooch was once just an idea in someone’s head that they chose to make into something tangible. Take what is in your head and make it real, kid.”

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATION

The research described here is exploratory in nature and predominantly qualitative in design. The role of quantitative data in this study—the SAWBIB instrument results used in purposive sampling and in establishment of population means to isolate shared experience or phenomena—is secondary, enabling the identification of trends or shapes to be investigated by the qualitative methods. For that reason, then, it would be disingenuous, if not just wrong, to abandon my qualitative approach; narrative methodology; and non-positivist, exploratory stance and dedicate this final chapter to translating the results (i.e., the sagas) into some other language.

No, if narrative inquiry is a legitimate, if imperfect, approach to educational research, as I believe has been established, and if my own procedures and methodological moves have been presented meticulously, transparently, with explicit justification made by sound theoretical frameworks—as I argue they have been—then the job of this chapter is not to tell the reader what he or she already read in the form of sagas. Rather, my objective in this final section is to reach all the way back to the foundational theories that foreground the design, data collection, and analysis, and to extract a handful of threads that run through it, to extend those into the present and to suggest the way they might extend into the future.

To accomplish that goal, I will approach this section in the following manner. I will ask the reader to reimagine the pair of three-strand "Viking" braids, themselves twisted around one another, that were present in the first chapter. One of these braids, the "construct braid," is made up of the three underlying constructs that I argued comprise

agentic writer identity: behavior, identity, and belief. The second braid, the "innovation braid," twines together the three strands of the innovation itself: choice, self-reflection, and mindset. I will devote the first section here to each strand of the first braid—considering a prominent phenomenon or observation associated with, in this order, behavior, identity, and belief. Then, as I move into a discussion of the implications of the forgoing study on classroom practice, I will break it down into the three strands of the innovation braid: choice, self-reflection, and mindset. I encourage the reader to, wherever desired, return not just to tables and charts in his or her consideration of this discussion but also to the saga itself. As mentioned previously, my hope as the author of these writer-sagas was that a satisfying amount of insight would present itself immediately to the reader, but that additional discoveries, insights, and tensions would await the reader who stuck with the texts a bit longer, or who returned to them more than once.

In light of the statistical analyses presented in the previous chapter, the reader might reconsider that question posed early in this discussion with regard to the tantalizing "chicken or egg" dilemma: Does a student's identification as writer incline him or her toward agentic writing beliefs? Or is the opposite true? Or is some other, less linear, relationship between the two constructs at play? Further research into the particular interaction of writer identity and writer beliefs may be called for to better understand this relationship; nevertheless, this statistical observation of the 39 participants overall does provide a compelling lens through which to examine the six primary participants' qualitative data. In the ensuing section, I will highlight a particularly interesting observation associated with each of the three SAWBIB constructs (behavior, identity, and belief).

Observations

Behavior: Sharing. From all data sources (the SAWBIB data, the journals from the sample groups, and the interviews with the "primary" participants rendered in saga form), one behavior features especially prominently. The first of these is the material that was coded as "sharing." By way of clarification, I will remind the reader that during the coding process, certain codes were grouped under shared categories, and then those categories were nested into the three underlying constructs. In this case, "sharing" was grouped under the category "external," which was collapsed under the construct BEHAVIOR. Therefore, "sharing" will first be discussed in this section through the lens of behavior, then it will be discussed in light of the other strands of the construct braid.

The reader should be reminded that this endeavor is not intended to essentialize, reduce, or diagnose any particular student, nor will the observations made in this or ensuing sections rise to the level of easily extractable conclusions. These are patterns of observation; the reader should carefully consider their relevance beyond the particular context in which the observations were made. Furthermore, though there is a semi-quantitative component to the data-collection methodology (e.g., SAWBIB results), this is not a quantitative study. Observations here will deal less with how many students reported what behaviors how often than with the ways that students across the spectrum of agentic writer identity talk about their writing behaviors. That caveat aside, some implications for practice and further research will be made.

The sharing to which participants most often—and most vividly or emotionally—refer is the sharing that took place every class period after the eight-minute journal time. Every participant who discussed these sharing opportunities did so with enthusiasm and

positivity. That is to say, no participant expressed any anxiety, discomfort, or displeasure at either sharing or listening to others share their journals. That said, some patterns emerged from the data with regard to sharing. Generally speaking, the participants at the poles of agentic writer identity, as suggested by SAWBIB profiles, discuss sharing with positivity, but minimally, and nearly exclusively in terms of what they got out of sharing their own work—with fleeting references to the benefit of receiving someone else's shared work.

At the highly agentic end of the spectrum (Dagny, HHH; Broder, HHM, Annar, HHM), participants speak and write about sharing somewhat minimally, but in rhetorically sophisticated ways (that is, making reference to what the "audience" thought of the work, oscillating between a literal audience in the form of classmates and an imagined audience of readers represented by the group in the room), whereas at the low-agentic pole, references to sharing, also minimal, emphasize the absence of judgment from a specific audience, the peer group.

In the middle of the spectrum, however, participants speak at length about the value of sharing and, most notably, discuss sharing in terms of both the value (to themselves) of sharing and the value (to themselves) of being shared with. Considering only the primary sample group here, as they provided more and more varied field texts than did the secondary sample, the following pattern begins to emerge: While highly agentic writers (e.g., Broder, Dagny) and low-agentic writers (e.g., Einvald) speak of sharing very little or not at all, the students in the middle of the spectrum—notably those whose "Identity" construct score was "medium" (Solvor, Ragna, and Annar) speak and write vividly of the value of sharing to both writer and audience—and to the group as a

community. Solvor (profile MMM) referred to the way her class community received members' work, saying, "my class was really good at giving compliments and making people feel good about what they wrote." Annar (HMH) said that "I saw that other people had experimented with [writing fiction] in their journals, and that made me inclined to do the same in mine." Ragna (LML) boasted "I know my section, section 3, has such love and admiration for each other that any time someone shares we all seem to glow and bounce off each others' intelligence and talent."

It is interesting that it is the students with "medium" agentic writer identity have the broadest view of the value of sharing, emphasizing benefit to themselves as writers (Annar), expressing empathy for sharers other than themselves (Solvor), and conveying the community-galvanizing and affectively positive aspects of sharing (Ragna). Here, then, is evidence that "producing" highly agentic writers (those who might turn out HHH profiles from the SAWBIB) may not be a sound objective. The possibility exists that a strongly high or low score in identity on the SAWBIB is merely evidence of a fixed mindset about writer identity. Consider two poles, for instance: Dagny, who has a high score for the construct identity, spoke and wrote not at all of the value of sharing writing; Einvald has a "low" score for the construct identity and also spoke hardly at all about sharing. One of the reasons that educators try to nurture growth, as opposed to fixed, mindsets in their students is because a fixed mindset, even if fixed in the "I'm good at this" position, inhibits experimentation, growth, and change.

This observation pivots into a potentially related observation: The aforementioned students with the "medium" scores for the identity construct, those who spoke and wrote about the writer, audience, and community values of sharing, also spoke about their own

change and growth (material coded as "change/growth") in ways that were notably different from those with both "high" and "low" identity scores. Consider Einvald (LLL), who wrote, "Looking to next semester, I can't see much changing overall. Maybe my writing will develop more, maybe it won't" or Dagny (HHH), who, while taking great creative license in composing her final journal reflection, did not devote any discussion to her future as a journaling, writing self.

By way of contrast, consider once again those students in the middle of the spectrum, those with "medium" scores for the "identity" construct: Ragna (LML) suggested that students should journal at the beginning of every class, all four years of high school, "so that by graduation you have four tangible examples of your growth as a person." Solvor concluded her journal reflection by commenting, "I'm honestly excited to see what I will write and how I will grow, not only as a writer, but as a person." Annar (HMH) mused that his sophomore journal would be of great value to him in his adult future: "I look forward to my older self looking back at sophomore year and being able to recall all the thoughts that were going through my head at that time," a sentiment predicated on the very idea that Annar's "older self"—note the way his language even echoes the "possible selves" theory—would not think the same things, or the same ways, in the future.

In short, it is the students with "medium" writer identity who seem to demonstrate growth mindset around their writing and their identities as writers. These students, unlike their peers at the poles, seem to view writing as having much to do with their overall identities and capable of contributing to shifts in their identities, whereas students at the poles think of themselves as writers (or not) and, separately, of writing as something they

do (or don't do). It appears that for the students in the middle of the spectrum, particularly those with "medium" writer identity construct scores, both the individual act of writing and the social nature of sharing and being shared with have the potential to change them as writers and as people. This observation invites a return to identity research, namely "possible selves" theory. In order to imagine a "possible" self, one must not be rigidly adhered to one's current self. One must be able to see other options or. Per Markus & Nurius (1986), "possible selves … have the potential to reveal the inventive and constructive nature of the self but they also reflect the extent to which the self is socially determined and constrained" (p. 954). That is, a student with "high" agentic writer identity may feel that he or she has been ordained a writer, either by self or others, and see little "possibility" of change or development there; likewise, the writer with "low" identity may feel that it has already been determined what kind of writer he is. For the writers in the middle, the identity is in flux, and therefore entails more possibility.

Identity: Story. As the reader will recall from the section devoted to methods, certain codes emerged during the data analysis process related to "story." Included in this category were the following codes: past, present, future, characters, and change/growth. Also discussed in the method section was the process by which material coded to story was used to complete story grids for the saga characters, graphic organizers derived from Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional-space approach to restorying and formalized by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002). The central "identity" observation or phenomenon t be examined here is this: while students at the higher end of the agentic-writer-identity spectrum appeared to devote more attention (as reflected in interviews and self-reflection) to elements coded as "future" and "past," and much less to material eventually

coded as "present," those at the lower end of the spectrum devoted less attention to their pasts, discussing instead their presents and their futures. However, even the nature of the way those students discussed these temporal storying elements—past, present, future, and characters, especially—appeared to be markedly dissimilar.

In terms of discussing their futures, those at the higher end of the agentic writer identity spectrum (as determined by SAWBIB results) speak and write in affirmatives—that is, they declare what they do want to be and do, as opposed to what they do not want to, or cannot, be and do. This is especially true of those two students with "high" scores for the construct identity (Dagny and Broder), and less true for Annar, whose SAWBIB scores suggested high behaviors and beliefs and medium identity. Take, for example, Dagny's declaration that when she thinks about her future she thinks she has almost too many options, but that "it all happens how it's supposed to and one thing might lead me to the real thing I want to do," or Broder's use of the word "aspire" in his declaration that he "aspire[s] to be a filmmaker or a writer one day." By way of contrast, consider the future talk from participants at the "low" end of the spectrum, especially those with "low" construct identity scores from the SAWBIB, like Einvald: "I do not see myself as someone who wants to go into a field where writing will be of great importance to me." What seems notable here—especially when considered through the lens of the established theoretical frameworks, as I will proceed to do—is not what Einvald expects about his future but rather that his only discussion of his future related to what he would not be, not what he would or could be. Of course, some of this affective stance is related to Einvald's pragmatism—in the same discussion, he considered his choices of courses for the next school year almost exclusively in terms of college applications.

Participants' considerations of their pasts are equally interesting. Perhaps notably, both Dagny and Broder discussed at length not only their current aspirations for the future but also past versions of their future aspirations—in this manner, a constantly changing future was folded into their reflections of their pasts. Both related a series of stages they had gone through as they tried to figure out what kind of person they were or wanted to be. Broder told a story about how, in middle school, he thought he was "100 percent history," but then he took chemistry, did well in it, and decided he wanted to be a chemist when he grew up. Now, as noted earlier, he hopes to be a filmmaker or author. Dagny described a similar process: "When I was younger, I went through this huge writing phase, and I was like 'I'm going to be an author,' and then I was like, 'no, just kidding, I'm going to be a poet,' and then I was like, 'no, I'll be a slam poet.'" Even hugging the writer identity pretty closely, Dagny, like Broder, reported how in the past, she churned through evolving future versions of herself—again, all declarations of what she *would* be, not what she *would not* be.

Einvald, the only LLL participant who, as a primary character, provided the full complement of field texts (interview and two journals), spoke and wrote hardly at all about his past, and certainly not about past versions of himself or past aspirations. However, in discussing the differences between "creative" and "expository" writing (as he understood them), Einvald said, "Expository writing is doing something new that is not really—I mean, it can be, but it for the most part—won't be shaped by your past experiences." He gives an example, drawn no doubt from the types of expository assignments he has experienced: "If you're, if you read a book and you're assigned an essay, it's—you take that book, what you've read of it, and do something with that."

Creative writing, on the other hand, per Einvald, "is drawing on everything you've known, learned over time, and making something that you think would be interesting." To Einvald, creative writing is about "ideas" (and the author's past), while expository writing is about "delivery" (and does not involve the author's past).

Notable also is Einvald's declaration that he does not enjoy creative writing—could it be that he does not enjoy the expectation that he include or involve his past in his writing? Or is it his sense of a future (or the absence of one) in creative writing (again, as he understands it) that influences his affectively negative stance toward it and his behaviors around that type of writing. Describing his creative writing process, Einvald sighed and said, "I don't do it to get published or anything obviously. I'm just a sophomore in high school." He went on to say that he did minimal revision and editing to his creative writing: "I am less worried about, like, making sure that all the grammar and everything's correct" than with his expository writing, which he works to tidy and polish. The temporal storying elements—past, present, and future—are all invoked here, but all with a negative slant: I'm "just" a sophomore, publication is "obviously" not an option, I "do not see myself" going into a writing field.

Now consider Ragna, whose agentic writer identity profile was LML. In discussing her past, she said described growing up in a "very intellectual and art-based household," offering the vivid detail that she had "Matisse and Keith Haring counting books." "So yeah, I like art," Ragna said—an affirmative declaration of self—but then she added, "Not that I really had a choice." Perhaps just a quip, or perhaps more significant indicator of the way Ragna conceives of her identity, which might extend to her consideration of her writer identity. In her art anecdote, Ragna claims art-loving as

something about herself, but seems to assert that it was designed into her by others' choices and values. Consider, too, that Ragna even theorized that her mother's love of art extended from being an art historian "in a past life." Here, it seems, is more evidence that Ragna might believe, on some level, that the things she is—the things people are—are determined by their pasts.

Characters as a story element—that is, the people who made appearances in students' journals and interviews, especially associated with writing—were strikingly different across the agentic writer identity spectrum. Einvald made no mention of anyone else—no parent, peer, sibling, teacher, or friend appeared in his journals or interviews, apart from a brief mention of a history teacher with whom Einvald shares an affection for *Lord of the Rings*. Moving across the spectrum, Ragna's characters were limited to a single friendly peer: she declared that she does not show her writing to her (artistic, growth-mindset-oriented, understanding) parents, but that she does voluntarily swap work with a friend, characterized here is Bodil. Solvor's characters were a particular parent and a peer group: discussed her father's input at length, and also mentioned voluntarily pursuing peer-review when it was offered as an option. Solvor's reason for turning to her father was that "he's a good writer" and she "trusts his judgment." Annar's characters were his parents—prominently, his mother and, to a lesser extent, his father. In fact, as can be seen in his portion of the saga, Annar's mother is a prominent figure in writing practice, as she "loves English" and "has read all the books that we read." When we get to the participant with the second-highest score on the SAWBIB, Broder, we see that peers as characters have nearly disappeared (see also the discussion on sharing) and that parents or family members who appear do so because of their occupations as writers,

not, as in the case of Solvor or Annar, because of qualities they display. Broder shows his work to an uncle who is a screenwriter. Dagny, the only sample student with a "highly" agentic writer identity (HHH), invoked no characters with whom she shares her work (parents, friends, peers, etc.) and also made no mention of sharing. In this regard, then, Dagny seems as isolated as Einvald—though any observer would probably find them as different as can be in their approach to, behaviors around, and feelings about writing.

Belief: Anxiety. The observation related to agentic writing belief which I will focus on here is one that, unlike the previous observations, is nearly constant across the spectrum. Unlike sharing behaviors or storying elements, which hinted at patterns across the data set, anxiety was a constant: all participants, irrespective of their writer identity profile, expressed stress and anxiety—in general, and specific to writing. However, the nature of their anxiety—its origins, and their techniques for its alleviation—were different almost as different as the participants themselves.

There was some overlap (e.g., pressure to get good grades) from many, but not all, participants (Ragna reported not caring about grades and felt no pressure from her parents to get good grades). Einar and Dagny, at opposite ends of the spectrum, discussed the pressure of college acceptance. For Solvor, the primary source of stress was what felt to her like a guessing game: trying to figure out what teachers wanted and give it to them, a process that was made more difficult when she was presented with choices and/or ill-structured tasks. For Annar, stress came from feeling as if he was expected to "do [writing] a certain way," not knowing what to write about, doubting whether ideas would come to him, and also from habit: "I was freaking out [before a test] because that's what I do." For Broder, stress came from writing what he perceived as expository, academic

writing (that is, anything but fiction—essentially in direct opposition to Einvald's feelings on the matter), but also from worrying that, when he made choices about assignments or topics, his teachers would think he "took the easy" route. For Dagny, choices themselves were stressful—worrying that she would make the "wrong" choice, even as she reassured herself that the wrong choice would likely work out in the end. And for Ragna, stress came when she perceived excessive—or really any—constraints ("The more open, the better," she said) as well as from news and current events.

If we consider this inventory of worries, four categories of anxiety around choice emerge: 1) highly variable levels of anxiety about the *structured nature* of the task (too much or too little choice); 2) variable levels of anxiety about what I will call the *authenticity* of the choice (i.e., are there secret expectations that aren't being disclosed, which a chooser might fail to meet with the wrong choice?); 3) almost universal anxiety about the *outcome or repercussions* of the choice, short- and long-term; and 4) frequent expressions of anxiety about others' (especially teachers') *regard* of the chooser based on the choice.

To summarize the key takeaways of this section, as regards behavior, those students with "middle" agentic identity scores (that is, scores within +/-0.66 standard deviations of the mean for the identity construct) had the broadest interpretation of the value of sharing writing, incorporating the importance of sharing and being shared with. These students also exhibited strong growth-oriented mindsets about their potential for change and development as writers. As for identity, those participants with highly agentic belief scores considered their futures in affirmative terms and accounted for more change in their pasts than did students with low agentic belief construct scores. Finally, with

regard to belief, anxiety (and its close cousin, stress) were pervasive across the board. This finding was consistent with the Challenge Success data-collection described in Chapter 1.

Implications for Practice

In this section, I will make an effort to connect my research and findings to potential practical application in the classroom. Any reader who might be inclined to implement this innovation should of course consider these implications and suggestions with his or her own context in mind.

As discussed in the review of the literature, choice is one of the ways that teachers attempt to increase student engagement and ownership, improve students' affective stances toward school, and allay the anxiety that comes as a product of excessive constraint (Patall, Cooper, & Wynn, 2010). However, as with so many aspects of teaching, a phrase my mom often said comes to mind when I consider how to improve my implementation of choice in the secondary English classroom: "You can make all of the people happy some of the time, or some of the people happy all of the time, but you can never make all of the people happy all of the time." My students are people—and as such, they are different from one another. In my experience, no book, assignment, topic, or activity is loved (or reviled) by absolutely every student, and no amount or type of choice will likely be perfectly comfortable for every student, every time.

The goal of designing choice into the class design should be to maximize, for every student, the agentic potential of choice—to give every student, via choice, socioculturally mediated (that is, by and through engagement with others and via self-reflection) capacity (potential, space) to act (modify behaviors based on the sociocultural

mediation and self-reflection). Doing so does not require that students always have infinite choices about everything, nor that choice always be comfortable. However, the necessary approach given this variability seems to require two things: consideration on the part of the teacher about what the choices are and how choosing is designed so that students are empowered to be knowledgeable, agentic choosers, and self-reflection and self-awareness on the part of the student to examine the origins of discomfort and to increasingly embrace productive discomfort. That second component will be discussed in the context of self-reflection; this portion will be devoted to teachers' design of choice opportunities.

First, a teacher offering choices must sincerely reflect on her own motivations for doing so and must ensure that she does not, in fact, believe that one choice or another is "better." If, for example, she is asking students to write an essay on a book in a scenario like Einvald described, and she has prescribed a set of topics or allowed students to come up with their own, she must be certain that she truly thinks all the choices she is offering are worthy choices. She cannot, for example, hold that students who design their own topics are either more creative or, alternatively, less dutiful or engaged, than their peers who select one of the teacher-designed topics. An option here would be to have the class as a whole design the set of options being extended as prescribed topics. The collaborative, transparent, socially constructed nature of this process may help to allay students' anxieties that the teacher has a secret favorite choice or that her esteem of them will suffer if they choose a "bad" choice.

Relatedly, it seems important for a teacher offering choices to make sure that students have had an opportunity to experience the types of options from which they are

choosing. If a teacher offers, as I have, a menu of choices for students to demonstrate understanding including: analytic (that is, academic) essay, fiction or other inventive ("creative") writing, presentation (e.g., PowerPoint, Prezi), movie, or 3-dimensional art object, the current study seems to suggest that students' choices will be heavily guided by their identity and their mindset. A student like Broder, who aspires to be a writer and claims the writer identity for himself, will likely choose the "creative" assignment, while Einvald will likely choose the expository essay that, in his mind, requires less of his past and will serve him better in the future. Neither student, in that case, is stepping outside of his comfort zone and, as such, neither is likely to collect as much new information about himself, his capabilities, etc., as he would if he chose something else. These choices, then, affirm the students' narrative identity around writing, but do not do much to complicate it or develop it further. Therefore, it is crucial that students be required to produce work in the modes that will be available for them to choose from. It is useless, if not also disingenuous, for a teacher to say, "You can make a film for your final exam!" if making films in response to the course content has never been discussed, included, or valued.

In response to, or in anticipation of, students' uneasiness about teacher expectations, especially with ill-structured, choice-heavy tasks, it is crucial for teachers to design and communicate expectations with transparency. If a student believes that an academic essay will be graded by a rubric, but a film will be graded holistically and by the teacher's "gut," that suspicion will arouse anxieties like Solvor's. Again, taking the time to co-construct the rubric along with the students will increase transparency and reduce discomfort. It could be of value to introduce students to the concept of backward

design. For example, I before students chose their "Wild Card" projects I told them, "I need your projects to demonstrate that you understand the meaning of the term "social marginality" and that you have some insightful thoughts about how that term relates to *Best Intentions*. How you show those things to me is up to you." Although I distributed a rubric to all students that communicated these two content requirements and the third requirement that the presentation, whatever form they chose, be original and polished, I should have invited students to help me build the rubric. It is also advisable that the rubric itself include growth-mindset language to avoid the suggestion that a grade on a work is the final say on the value of the person who made it. It may seem euphemistic, but "developing" as an evaluation on an attribute of a work, as opposed to "insufficient," suggests the ongoing, iterative nature of work, and encourages revision.

Co-constructing rubrics with students is hardly a new idea; others, including Simmons and Page (2010), go a step further to suggest that teachers and students collaborate to grade the work itself, through a process of averaging the peer and teacher scores using the class-created rubric. In their study, Simmons and Page (2010) found a low variability between students' scores of one another and the teacher's score, suggesting that a teacher need not be the sole, final arbiter of the quality of student work. In fact, to return to Gee's (2003) concept of the classroom as a semiotic domain, it is unnatural for one person within that domain to claim to be the sole determiner of what counts as knowledge. The class content—of which grading expectations are no doubt a part--gets made in history by real people and their social interactions. They build that content in certain ways because of the people they are (socially, historically, culturally),

the beliefs and values they share, and their shared ways of talking, interacting, and viewing the world" (Gee, 2003, p. 28).

Finally, a class that features choice must also feature revision. If students feel that making the "wrong" choice can have final, deleterious effects (on their grades especially), they are likely to be inhibited choosers, choosing only what reinforces their narrative identity and feels safe. However, if students are free to revise their work—extending to, I would argue, even the freedom to re-choose—then there is no penalty, real or perceived, in choosing the "wrong" thing. This, too, is consistent with the tenets of growth mindset: a person is always becoming, never done. A person's work, as a reflection of his or her knowledge or understanding, should also be extended the option to keep becoming. Furthermore, students should be asked to self-reflect, in writing, about their choices and their revision plans, so that they can be supported in seeing how the work they did on a first attempt can be conveyed to the second or subsequent attempts to make it stronger. More attention to the role written self-refection can and should play in the choice-rich, agency-supportive classroom follows here.

Lengelle and Meijers (2010), writing about the utility of writing to help individuals explore and construct career identities, describe three types of writing useful for personal development: reflective, expressive, and creative. Certainly much writing incorporates elements of all three, and, in fact, what I have referred to as self-reflection in this study encompasses writing of all three types. Nevertheless, it is useful to examine each of the three (yet another braid?) and consider their applicability to a classroom environment that is designed to foster agentic writer identity.

Reflective writing, per Lengelle and Meijers (2010) is that writing in which one "take[s] something into oneself—a topic, an event, a relationship—for the purpose of contemplation or examination" (p. 56). This type of writing is only one dimension of writing as a crucial tool for personal development (Lengelle & Meijers, 2014), and it is appropriate for structuring student reflections around choice. Self-reflection in the choice-rich classroom should take place at every stage of choosing: students should write about their reaction to the menu of choices (initial reflection), they should write once they have made their selection (mid-process reflection), they should write once they have completed the work but before it was graded (completion reflection), and they should write again after assessment of the work (whether by the teacher alone or by the teacher and peers) is complete (post-assessment reflection). These self-reflections must be available to the student at all times (that is, not kept by the teacher). For that reason, it is advisable to have students complete these self-reflections electronically. It is also advisable that students be provided with a structure for these self-reflections so that they are invited to probe beyond the immediate and easily affirming ideas.

Reflecting meaningfully on their own thinking and choices will not necessarily be easy or comfortable for all students; I have encountered early attempts from students which struggle to go beyond "I don't know, I just picked what seemed most appealing to me," with little exploration of why certain tasks appealed while others did not. For that reason, particularly in students' first attempts to write reflectively about their choices, it is useful to provide them with sentence starters, as seen in Table 9. Teachers may find that the sentence starters can be abandoned at some point, or they may even make the use of sentence-starters a focus of student choice.

Table 9

Sentence starters for structuring self-reflection around choice

Initial Reflection	1. When I first heard about this assignment, I thought … 2. If I had to choose an option today, I would choose … because … 3. When I make my choice, it is important for me to take into account … 4. I would guess that most people I know will choose … because … 5. When I think about this choice, I feel …
Mid-process reflection	1. For this assignment, I made the choice to … because … 2. When I compare the choice I made to my initial reflection, I notice that … 3. My choice is similar to/dissimilar from the choices my peers made in that … 4. When I think about my choice, I feel …
Completion reflection	1. Now that I have completed the work for my choice, I think … 2. If I had this choice to make again, I would … 3. When I think about the work I submitted, I feel … 4. I would like the person/people who evaluate this work to know that …
Post-assessment reflection	1. Now that my work has been evaluated, my feelings about my choice are … 2. When I look back at my previous reflections about this choice, I notice that … 3. My goals for revision of the work are … 4. If I were making this choice and completing this work all over again, I would …

As Lengelle and Meijers (2010) demonstrate, a particular order of exercises for

include reflective, creative, and expressive modes, is necessary to best support students in "writing the self" (p. 56). Related to my observations in this study about the need to expose students to techniques and practices that can become part of their self-directed menu of choices, Lengelle and Meijers (2010) point out that, practically speaking, inviting students to "write a play!" as their first assignment can be terribly intimidating and vague and that the kind abstract thinking about the self that narrative identity features is developed in stages. This reflective writing around choice, initially structured as above, is intended to "cultivate [students'] ability to notice and observe patterns and engage more diologically with [their] life material" (Lengelle &Meijers, 2010, p. 56). It also calls on them to identify change and growth, which, as they receive instruction in growth mindset, they can frame as evidence of their continued becoming. As students progress through the year, their ability to reflect on their choices in increasingly abstract ways—perhaps rejecting the structure of the above reflection sentence-starters for a story, a poem, etc.—will likely increase as students incorporate creative and expressive elements as well as reflective elements.

Lengelle and Meijers (2010) describe expressive writing as that which helps individuals process traumatic life events, including job losses and chronic illnesses. This sort of writing is viewed as being therapeutic in nature. Here I am reminded of how many of my participants in this study referred to the stress-relieving power of in-class journal time in letting them "spill," material, which I coded as "release" and placed under the "emotion" category. In comparison to job loss or chronic illness, a grade on an assignment might hardly seem to rise to the level of trauma. Then again, as I observed anecdotally before undertaking this research and as emerged in the field texts themselves,

anxiety, much of it around grades, is so real, so persistent and so troubling, as to be rendered as a troll in my sagas. Certainly the reflective writing prompts delve into this expressive territory, inviting students to consider their feelings about their choices and the outcomes of those choices. However, I will further argue that a class that emphasizes choices in graded assignments should also have the component of ungraded daily writing time so that students regularly have the option of moving into an expressive mode of "writing the self" (Lengelle & Meijers, 2010, p. 56). If the only choices students make are ultimately assessed, even if collaboratively and by their peers, choosing may still be viewed as treacherous. Daily expressive writing allows students to experiment with choosing without fear of failure, practice which they can apply to formalized opportunities for choice. The in-class journal time also permits the teacher to guide the students in a kind of smorgasbord of writing modes for personal development, tailoring prompts to the immediately self-reflective ("if you were an animal, what animal would you be?"), the expressive ("describe a painful or traumatic experience from which you derived insight or meaning"), and the creative ("Look at this picture and write about what you think is going on").

Finally, "creative" modes of writing the self, per Lengelle and Meijers (2010), ask individuals to write "fiction or fictional autobiography for therapeutic purposes or to gain self-insight" (p. 54). Notably, this is precisely what both Dagny (HHH) and Runa/Squonk (LLL) did, without prompting, for their final self-reflections, Runa depicting herself as Squonk for a fictional component of her reflection, and Dagny writing the entire thing in the first person perspective of a detective who found Dagny's journal and was attempting to understand and interpret it. Teachers interested in cultivating agentic writer identity

may invite students to write the fictional accounts—the narratives, indeed, the sagas—of their becoming the writers they are. Per Moskowitz (2002), "creative writing is almost always fuelled by personal experience and so carries profound truths behind the fiction" (qtd. in Lengelle & Meijers, 2010, p. 54). How similar that is to Einvald's understanding of fiction as incorporating the author's past! The narrative identity model writ large is predicated on the idea that "stories are used to make sense of experience, particularly experiences that violate our expectations" (McLean, 2008, p. 1686). Certainly that lens could be turned on aspects of our identity—in this case, writer identity. Asking students to make sense of their writing experiences—and therefore writer identities—asks them to integrate their pasts, their presents, and their futures in just the manner that the most highly agentic writers in the current study did. Per the narrative identity model, that ability of the self to construct a story shapes the next self. Students not inclined to—or invited to—consider their writing stories in this way may be missing an opportunity to consider their writing futures, and writing selves.

Another component of students' identity stories—and, as evident from the current research, their writing stories—is the characters who populate them. As discussed previously, most participants invoked others (e.g., peers, parents, relatives, friends) with whom they shared their writing (or did not), with varying levels of comfort. Mothers in particular appeared with frequency, most vividly in Annar's field texts (see his saga). Learning does not happen in isolation, nor does identity formation. Learning to write—and developing a writer identity—is no exception. McLean and Jennings (2012) examined the role that maternal and peer audiences supported narrative identity development in teenagers. McLean and Jennings (2012) point to established body of

research that positions mothers as primary influences on young children's narrative identity development and posit that, in adolescence, some of those dynamics are (appropriately) transferred to peer relationships. Nevertheless, the mother-adolescent relationship remains important in narrative identity development, and so I will focus here on a potential practitioner application of the role of mothers—which I will extend to parents of any gender—in cultivating their children's agentic writer identities.

McLean and Jennings (2012) describe the role of others (in their study, mothers and peers) in conversational interaction with adolescents narrating stories of themselves as "scaffolding" of the narrative identity, which includes six behaviors: 1) asking elaborative questions, 2) asking reiteration questions, 3) expressing confirmation, 4) expressing negation, 5) asking yes/no questions, and 6) making "move along" contributions to the story being told. In their study, McLean and Jennings (2012) found that mothers did more than peers of every kind of narrative scaffolding except negation—which mothers did more of as their children aged through adolescence. It seems that there is an opportunity here—albeit one that will be addressed at more length in the suggestions for further research—to guide parents in the role they can play in scaffolding, and thereby cultivating, their children's identities as writers. One suggestion would be to encourage parents to narrate their own writer-becoming sagas to their students, as McLean and Jennings (2012) found that mothers who disclosed vulnerability or who engaged in meaning-making around life events with their children had children who did more of the same.

Additionally, McLean and Jennings (2012) found that adolescents made more meaning of their experiences when their mothers negated—that is, pushed back—on the

storyteller's version of him or herself. This finding may be uncomfortable or counterintuitive for parents who want to support and affirm their children's identities. Parents should be guided, perhaps through a series of clinics, in how to talk to their children about their writing. Here, too, is an opportunity to extend growth-mindset language and values to the people who have strong influence on students' identity development. Parents should receive instruction in growth-mindset-oriented ways of responding to their students' writing and attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors around writing, while still offering healthy amounts and forms of negation.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

As is the nature of many action research studies, this one is context-specific, with a small research population. The observations and implications here cannot be neatly transferred to any place. Perhaps paradoxically, some of the elements of the current research that make it worthwhile and exciting—the double-braid nature of the constructs and innovation, my epistemological rejection of positivism around writing, and my deep level of personal engagement—make it also somewhat limited in its applicability.

Because the design of the study was not experimental, it is impossible to determine which strand of innovation, or what combination of strands of the innovation, contributes to students' development of agentic writer identity. An experimental structure (withholding a strand of the innovation from some students) was neither feasible nor ethical, in my view. Nevertheless, having made a case that the interrelated nature of the innovations is deliberate, it seems worthwhile to explore more completely, and perhaps more experimentally, the particular interplay of choice and mindset, choice and self-reflection, mindset and self-reflection. These are viable avenues for further investigation.

Another limitation may be the absence of SAWBIB data at the end of the data-collection period. I wanted to avoid even the temptation of saying "SAWBIB scores went up after four short months, three journal assignments, and one mindset lesson!" so I did not structure a post-test. That said, it would be interesting to see if there was, in fact, any shift in agentic writer identity as indicated by the SAWBIB at the end of the year. Furthermore, it would be worthwhile to subject the SAWBIB as an instrument to further analysis and evaluation. If it was the students with "middle" agentic identity construct scores (Solvor, for example) who demonstrated the most fluidity and the least fixedness in their attitudes, then perhaps the instrument as designed is measuring not writer identity as the second underlying construct but rather fixedness of that identity. The instrument, once revised, could be evaluated for its applicability as a tool to aid in curriculum design—again, taking context into account.

Another avenue ripe for further exploration is the interaction of identity and belief around writing. As discussed in the Results section (Chapter 4), there appears to be a particular interaction between these two constructs that invites closer study. For example, are beliefs about the cognitive capabilities of writing contributors to students' claims of writer identity, or does making a claim to writer identity incline one to agentic beliefs around writing? This question could be explored through a refined quantitative instrument or more focused qualitative data collection—or, likely, some combination of the two.

Another area for extension of the current line of inquiry might entail examining students' construction of agentic writer identity while incorporating the students' perception of their teacher's writer identity. Here, I harken back to Atwell (2015), who

somewhat dismissively refers to an early research effort of her own that predated her development of the workshop model described in Chapter 2: a study of "the effects on students' writing when they viewed the teacher as a writer" (p. 9).

My own strongly held identity as a writer—and my recognition in some of my participants of behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes that I share—may have, in some ways, affected my engagement with the students, even if I endeavored to be as objective as possible. After all, Dagny reminds me of me at 15, and so it is worth considering to what extent our interview, semi-structured as it was, felt to either of us like compatible writers "geeking out" about writing, whereas an interview with Einvald, who expressed beliefs so counter to my own (the uselessness of creative writing, the sterility of expository writing), lacked that tacit warmth and conviviality. To what extent might those nonverbal cues have recircuited, reinforced the participants' identities or declarations of such?

Finally, the lack of member-checking, which I opted not to undertake, could impair the validity of my interpretations. Because I am these students' teacher, I did not want to reflect back to them my versions of them, which I acknowledge are inflected by my own identity and my inherently subjective methodology. I was worried that, for example, Annar's learning that I fixated on his relationship with his mother, as admiring as I feel of it, would be uncomfortable for him or would prompt him to question whether a young man of his age should have such a relationship with his mother. Any of the details I fixated on—Broder's obsession with originality, Solvor's uncertainty—though defensibly present in the field texts, could be hurtful reflected back to the actual students by their teacher. By not member-checking, I am acknowledging that these are my stories

of my students—per Picasso, “art is the lie that tells the truth”—and that while I may hear truth, my students may hear lies.

Just as the Norse saga writers were separated from the people they wrote about by several centuries, I am separated from my students by adulthood, by teacherhood. The saga writers, putting pen to paper in 12th-century Iceland, could not go back to 8th-century Norway to check their interpretations with the farmers they wrote about. They had to use the evidence they had, and they had to serve the genuine intention to tell the story as best they could. That is what I have done here.

CHAPTER 6

SERINE'S SAGA

Also living in Ornfjord was an old woman named Serine. She wasn't truly so old, just older than the Annar and Broder and Ragna and Dagny and Bodil and Kyrre and Lage and Runa and Solvor and Einvald, and so she seemed old by comparison. She had of course once been a girl—she felt compelled to remind the others of this, from time to time. As a girl, she had lived in a place both like and unlike Ornfjord. The fjord where Serine grew up was not nestled into the belly of a mountain shaped like a camel, nor did it receive such helpings of sunshine. But Serine's old fjord had its own tummy-stomping troll, and its own population of weavers and carvers and shipbuilders, its law-readers and poets and farmers.

Serine had left her village when she was 18, just a bit older than her Ornfjord neighbors were. She left with a baby girl tucked under her arm. She loved the baby girl, and thought she would never love another child as much. She was heartbroken, then, when the girl grew up and ran away.

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APPENDIX A

SAWBIB SURVEY INSTRUMENT

I like to have my writing critiqued by other students.

I enjoy writing when I control the topic.

I engage in writing beyond the writing that is required for school.

I enjoy having others read my writing.

I appreciate writing because I engage in self-directed writing (I write about what I want to).

I am involved in writing because it lets me share my thinking with others.

I am a writer.

I feel confident as a writer.

Being a writer has much to do with how I feel about myself.

Being a writer is an important part of who I am.

I am happy I am a writer.

I have a sense of inner security that comes from being a writer.

By writing, I understand things better.

When I write, I learn.

When I write, it changes my thinking.

I have found that writing helps me to learn school material better.

For me writing leads to understanding.

Writing helps me to think better.

When I write, I feel I am in charge

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL

On 8/30/2016 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Adolescents' Identity as Writers
Investigator:	Ray Buss
IRB ID:	STUDY00004804
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Journal Prompts, Category: Participant materials (specific directions for them); • Letter of Support from School, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); • Parent Recruitment/Permission Letter and Consent Form, Category: Consent Form; • Student Assent Form, Category: Consent Form; • Survey, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • IRB Protocol, Category: IRB Protocol; • Student Interview Questions, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Small Group Interview Questions, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (1) Educational settings on 8/30/2016.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,
IRB Administrator

cc:
Andrea Decker

APPENDIX C

POPULATION AGENTIC WRITER IDENTITY PROFILES

ID (*primary; **secondary)	Behavior Construct Score	Identity Construct Score	Belief Construct Score	+/- Beh.	+/- Id.	+/- Bel.	Writer Profile
1	2.5	2.0	1.86	-0.36	-0.7	-1.22	LLL
2*	2.83	2.5	3.14	-0.03	-0.2	+0.06	MMM
3	3.33	2.33	3.0	+0.47	-0.37	-0.08	HMM
4	3.17	3.33	3.43	+0.31	+0.63	+0.35	MHH
5	2.67	3.0	3.57	-0.19	+0.3	+0.49	MMH
6*	2.33	3.0	2.29	-0.53	+0.3	-0.79	LML
7	2.67	2.83	3.0	-0.19	+0.13	-0.08	MMM
8	2.33	1.83	2.14	-0.53	-0.87	-0.94	LLL
9	2.83	3.67	3.0	-0.03	+0.97	-0.08	MHM
10*	2.5	1.83	2.71	-0.36	-0.87	-0.37	LLL
11	2.5	2.33	3.29	-0.36	-0.37	+0.21	LMM
12	2.67	2.83	3.57	-0.19	+0.13	+0.49	MMH
13**	2.5	1.83	2.29	-0.36	-0.87	-0.79	LLL
14	2.83	2.83	3.29	-0.03	+0.13	+0.21	MMM
15**	3.2	2.0	2.71	+0.34	-0.7	-0.37	HLL
16	4.0	3.75	4.0	+1.14	+1.05	+0.92	HHH
17*	3.5	3.33	3.29	+0.64	+0.63	+0.21	HHM
18	2.17	2.17	3.14	-0.69	-0.53	+0.06	LLM
19	2.67	2.33	3.0	-0.19	-0.37	-0.08	MMM
20	3.5	2.67	3.14	+0.64	-0.03	+0.06	HMM
21	3.5	3.17	3.14	+0.64	+0.47	+0.06	HHM
22**	2.67	2.83	3.14	-0.14	+0.21	+0.06	MMM
23	2.67	2.33	2.57	-0.19	-0.37	-0.51	MML
24	2.5	1.83	2.29	-0.36	-0.87	-0.79	LLL
25	2.0	2.5	2.57	-0.86	-0.2	-0.51	LML
26	3.17	2.83	2.71	+0.31	+0.13	-0.37	MML
27	2.67	2.5	3.0	-0.19	-0.2	-0.08	MMM
28	2.83	2.67	3.71	-0.03	-0.03	+0.63	MMH
29	2.67	2.5	3.0	-0.19	-0.2	-0.08	MMM
30	4.0	3.5	3.86	+1.14	+0.8	+0.78	HHH
31	3.83	3.17	3.14	+0.97	+0.47	+0.06	HHM
32*	3.5	3.0	3.57	+0.64	+0.3	+0.49	HMH
33	2.5	2.83	3.0	-0.36	+0.13	-0.08	LMM
34*	3.33	4.0	3.43	+0.47	+1.3	+0.35	HHH
35**	2.33	2.5	2.86	-0.53	-0.2	-0.22	LMM
36	2.5	3.17	3.71	-0.36	+0.47	+0.63	LHH
37	2.17	3.0	3.0	-0.69	+0.3	-0.08	LMM
38	2.67	1.5	2.57	-0.19	-1.2	-0.51	MLL
39	3.17	3.17	4.0	+0.31	+0.47	+0.92	MHH

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE GROUP WRITER IDENTITY PROFILES

Name	Behavior Construct Score	Identity Construct Score	Belief Construct Score	+/- Beh.	+/- Id.	+/- Bel.	Writer Profile
SOLVOR	2.83	2.5	3.14	-0.03	-0.2	+0.06	MMM
RAGNA	2.33	3.0	2.29	-0.53	+0.3	-0.79	LML
EINVALD	2.5	1.83	2.71	-0.36	-0.87	-0.37	LLL
BRODER	3.5	3.33	3.29	+0.64	+0.63	+0.21	HHM
ANNAR	3.5	3.0	3.57	+0.64	+0.3	+0.49	HMH
DAGNY	3.33	4.0	3.43	+0.47	+1.3	+0.35	HHH
SQUONK	2.5	1.83	2.29	-0.36	-0.87	-0.79	LLL
LAGE	3.2	2.0	2.71	+0.34	-0.7	-0.37	HLL
KYRRE	2.67	2.83	3.14	-0.14	+0.21	+0.06	MMM
BODIL	2.33	2.5	2.86	-0.53	-0.2	-0.22	LMM

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. When I told you we were going to talk about writing today, what did you think?
2. Tell me about writing in your life.
    a. What do you write?
    b. For whom?
    c. When, where, why?
3. When a teacher introduces a new writing assignment, how do you feel?
4. Tell me about your writing process.
    a. How do you start?
    b. How do you know when you're done?
5. Tell me about the last thing you wrote.
6. Now I'd like to shift gears and talk about choices you make in your life. Tell me about the last time you made a choice.
7. How does it feel to make choices?
8. Thinking about that last choice, why did you choose what you chose?
    a. If you had that same opportunity again, would you make the same choice? Why or why not?
9. Now a final question about thinking: Do you have any idea how writing affects your brain? Do you have any guesses?

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Andrea Avery holds a B.A. in Music and an MFA in Creative Writing (Fiction) from Arizona State University. She teaches English at Phoenix Country Day School in Paradise Valley, Arizona. She is the author of the book *Sonata: A Memoir of Pain and the Piano* (Pegasus Books).